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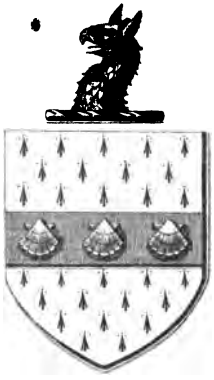

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WAIT FOR THE END.

A STORY.

BY

MARK LEMON.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, 11, BOUVERIE STREET.
1863.

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WAIT FOR THE END.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER I.

JACK SPRAGGATT RETURNS TO MORDEN AND AFTERWARDS VISITS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Whilst Warner and Elliott and other friends were exerting themselves for the discovery of Edward and Florence, Jack Spraggatt had paid a stolen visit to Morden, in the expectation of finding Jasper Jellifer, from whom he hoped to obtain some valuable information respecting the lost ones. There was a railway then to Morden, and as Jack had not the heart to look up any of his old cronies—so anxious was he concerning the fate of his niece and her husband—he took up his quarters at the Station Inn, as a place where he was less likely to be recognised, than at any of his old haunts in the town. He needed not to

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have been concerned about himself, for the changes which time had made in him and in the dwellers in Morden would have enabled him to have passed anywhere without question, or even observation. The railroad had converted Morden into a busy place, and the presence of a stranger was not the event it had been twenty years before.

He found, as we know, that Jasper had gone to reside in London—although, as Sir Gilbert's collector, he paid occasional visits to the old town; but as his business was to collect money and arrange difficulties, he was not over-welcome at any time. His residence in London, Jack learned, was in one of the streets of the City, and at no great distance from the office of Warner's agent. The up mail train passed through Morden about midnight; and therefore Jack, having some time upon his hands, made his way to the churchyard, which stood just outside the town. How many times had he revisited it in his dreams and his waking hours, since he had been away a lonely dweller in the Bush! It was the only spot

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which had remained unchanged, it seemed to him, and he was glad that it was so. He made his way through the old lych-gate beneath whose covering so many of the dead had halted on the way to their places of rest, leaving behind them for ever the busy world, in which they had played their parts for good or evil. On one side of the churchyard was a row of almshouses, their doors opening into it, as though the poverty of the indwellers had made death and its memories no longer terrible. As Jack Spraggatt approached the graves of his parents he was moved almost to tears (poor Jack! his woman's heart was always ready to well forth) to see that some friendly hands had been employed upon them during the day, and had clipped away the long grass and weeds. The pious task was not completed, and the worker's basket and well-worn shears were left behind, to be again employed before the sun went down. Jack felt interested to learn who had such grateful remembrances of the departed; but being desirous of keeping his visit to Morden unknown, he placed a bright new sovereign

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on the blade of the shears, and withdrew to another part of the churchyard. He had scarcely done so, when an old woman came from one of the almshouses to resume her self-imposed employment; and he was gratified to observe that her wonder and delight were extreme when she discovered Jack Spraggatt's gift. As she turned her face about in search of the good fairy that had made her so rich and happy, Jack recognised in her his nurse, whom he had left a buxom woman of forty. Pleased with what he had observed, but still desirous of keeping his visit unknown, and remembering that a footpath in the adjoining field led nearly to the Elms, he felt himself impelled to take it, and visit, as it were, another burial-place, where so many of his young hopes were lying. The dear old home was changed indeed! It had followed the fortunes of many other yeomen's dwellings when the temptation of higher rents added farm to farm, dispersing their happy households to seek fresh fields and pastures new, or compelling them to exchange their free out-door country lives for the monotonous toil

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of the pent-up city. The Elms farm, by Jasper's advice, had been united to an adjoining one, and the house was now let to labourers, who had neither time nor inclination to keep the once trim garden in decent order, but were content to grow there potatoe patches and cabbage rows where Jack remembered only flowers. Many graver sorrows give no sharper pang than such a sight, so witnessed. Jack cared to see no more of Morden and its neighbourhood, so hastening back to the Station Inn he endeavoured to smoke himself into a happier state of mind; but the experiment was not successful, as he could not avoid remembering that the time had been when he could not have visited the old town without having a score of good friends to keep him company. There are many lonely vigils passed in inn parlours, made more lonely from the associations with which such places are beset; and the recollection of old days giving Jack the heart-ache, he was glad when the railway-bell summoned him to take his seat in the train for London.

On the following day, Jack started on a visit

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to Jasper Jellifer, and had nearly reached the house of our old acquaintance, before he remembered the letter which Raymond had confided to him. It was some time before he could recollect where he had deposited it, but as he had given a promise to deliver it, he was sure he had it safely somewhere. After rummaging certain boxes, which had not been disturbed since his return to England, he came upon the forgotten letter No. 1; but as No. 2 principally concerned himself, he did not continue the search.

Jasper Jellifer's place of business was gloomy enough, in all conscience. The street itself was narrow, having no outlet at one end, as though to exclude half the daylight that struggled into it, for the sun only had a fair chance for about an hour during the day. Jasper's lower windows were carefully whitewashed, so that he might have been engaged in forging bank-notes, or sweating sovereigns, or distilling without a licence, or some other illicit proceeding, without detection from any passer-by. His name was written in a fair black letter, on each side of the doorway,

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and beneath it he was described as "Commission Agent, &c.," whatever that ambiguous designation might have signified. Jack, however, entered boldly, and was received by a rough straight-haired head and a pair of spectacles, which popped up, like a Jack-in-the-box—it was quite as ugly—from behind a square curtained desk.

"Your pleasure, sir?" asked the head.

"I want to speak with Mr. Jellifer, sir," replied Jack.

"On business, sir?"

"Of course on business, sir."

"That is quite sufficient, sir," said the head. "Mr. J. is at dinner, but if it is on business, he doesn't mind being disturbed in the least. Oblige me with your name, sir."

"Mr. John Spraggatt," replied Jack.

"Mr. John—Spiggott, did you say?" asked the head, again bobbing up.

"S-p-r-a-g-g-a double t," replied Jack, not in any way disconcerted by the mistake in his name.

The head disappeared like a flash,—the simile

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being suggested by the glitter of the descending spectacles.

In another minute the whole of the Jack-in-the-box came forth, and it was not surprising that he should have contented himself, generally, with exhibiting the only part which nature had clothed, as some experimentalist had been evidently trying to ventilate him, so cracked and seam-broken were his garments. Jack Spraggatt put his salary at six shillings a week, remembering Jasper's character for liberality.

The clerk's message soon brought Jellifer down-stairs—as he lived in the house, to be ready for any job on an emergency, he said, and had not invited Jack Spraggatt up, until he—with commendable prudence—had satisfied himself that he was in good case, and not likely to require assistance of a kind which would not pay a commission.

As Jack looked well to-do, Jasper received him with the utmost cordiality, and expressed his regret that his visit had not been made an hour earlier, and in time for dinner. The truth

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was that Jellifer had had instructions to detain Jack in the office, until Mrs. Jellifer could clear away the fragments of their very limited meal, in case hunger might have tempted him to covet the uninviting morsel which remained.

The Jellifers had grown rich, and loved their money-hoards so well, that they cared even for the farthings.

Mrs. Jellifer was, of course, delighted to see Mr. Spraggatt, as he had come upon business, and, therefore, as there was no necessity for any hospitable display, she considerately placed upon the table a bottle of ink, pens and writing paper, and, then having a due regard for commercial proprieties, withdrew into an inner chamber.

Jack knew Jasper well enough, to be certain that unless his own interests were to be served in some way, he was not likely to trouble himself with the affairs of other people; and Mr. Spraggatt, after briefly referring to his colonial experiences, inquired how far Jasper was in a position to dispose of certain produce which had accompanied him to England, and as to the rate

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of commission to be charged for agency. Jasper was tickled at once, and after a few pertinent questions, he formed very enlarged opinions of Mr. Spraggatt's wealth, and saw such a profitable accession of business, that he even invited Jack to take a glass of wine, a proposal which was respectfully declined.

"And, now, a word or two about old acquaintance," said Jack, who then inquired after many of the old burghers of Morden, and learned how some had died, how some had left the place, and how others had become bankrupt, whilst a few lived and thrived, as Jasper had done.

"The Norwolds," said Jack, carelessly—"they have almost deserted the old place, have they not?"

"Entirely, you may say," replied Jasper. "I never can persuade Sir Gilbert to pay his people there a visit, and, consequently, I have to see to everything."

"His second marriage brought him a large accession of property, did it not?" asked Jack.

"Some ten or twelve thousand pounds at first,"

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replied Jasper, "and her ladyship succeeded after her marriage to about £3000 a-year, which she had cleverly secured to herself by her marriage settlement. This money she spends."

"And not quite to Sir Gilbert's satisfaction, I conclude, from your tone, Mr. Jellifer?" said Jack.

"I do not say that," answered Jellifer, cautiously; "of course, her ladyship spends her own as she pleases; but I have reason to think that she does not confine herself to that amount."

Jack was rather surprised at this confidence on the part of Jasper, and felt satisfied he had a motive in giving it.

"Now, here," said Jasper, taking a paper from his side-pocket—"here is a note from her ladyship, and not the first I have received, asking for money—for an immediate loan, in fact, of three thousand pounds, as though I had three thousand pounds! The money would be safe enough, and the interest would be considerable, and some of the old family jewellery would be lodged as security. So the investment would be safe enough—if I had the money."

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Jack could not quite see his way through this labyrinth of words; and so he said, "Very true."

Jasper paused for a few moments, and then continued: "I have just been thinking that, possibly, Mr. Spraggatt, it might suit you to make this advance until such times as you can find a permanent investment for your capital. You see her ladyship would give 20 per cent. for the loan, and—does it seem feasible, Mr. Spraggatt?"

Jack was not a quick thinker, but a vague notion came into his mind that some advantage to Warner, or Florence, or her husband, might come out of such a connection with Lady Norwold, and he resolved not to decline entertaining the proposal without consultation with his brother-in-law.

"Your proposition," he said, "is unexpected, and I hardly know what answer to make." Three thousand pounds on Lady Norwold's security, and your own. Hum!"

"Not my own," replied Jasper, quickly. "I make it a rule never to become security for any

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client, however responsible, as I might be tempted by the practice to involve myself with a bad one. No. The jewels — diamonds, I believe — are valuable, I am certain, and Lady Norwold dare not risk the consequences of non-payment. The interest, remember, is larger than it would be if the transaction were an ordinary commercial one."

"Very true," said Jack, looking profoundly usurious. "I had forgotten that. You must give me until to-morrow to decide."

"That will do," replied Jasper; "and as it is as well to be clear upon all matters of business, I shall look for a commission of, say one per cent., from you, and so we will leave the affair for the present."

"Certainly," said Jack. "And now tell me what has become of Sir Gilbert's son, Edward. He has married, I hear, against his father's consent, and been discarded. Is it not so?"

"It is, I believe," replied Jasper. "All I know of the matter is this: Sir Gilbert, before he went away to Rome, three months ago, desired

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me to stop his son's allowance, which I had formerly paid. That is all I know of the matter."

"And you have never heard from young Norwold?" asked Jack, earnestly.

"Yes; I think I did once," replied Jasper, looking furtively at Jack. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I am anxious to see him," said Jack.

"On business to his advantage?" asked Jasper, peering from under his eyebrows.

"Yes; I have no doubt but it would prove so."

As Jack said this, Jasper stroked his chin, and then rubbed his nose with his hand, as though he could say something more than he had done, and was considering the prudence of doing so. The two men sat silent for a few minutes, and then Jasper spoke.

"It is not altogether impossible that I might be able to find a clue to the young gentleman; but it would take time and trouble to accomplish it."

Jack thought quickly enough now.

"Mr. Jasper, if you will furnish me with any

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address of Mr. Norwold after he left his father's house, I will give you fifty pounds."

The offer almost took away Jasper's breath, and its magnitude made him hesitate to accept it, not on account of the amount, but because he thought that information so valuable might possibly be turned to better account. As he did not see how it could be at the moment, he followed Jack's example, and promised to see what could be done by the next day.

"Having disposed of those two matters of business, I have another communication which I should wish to make in the presence of Mrs. Jellifer, as it refers to one who died at my location in the Bush—Raymond Ray, the miller."

Jasper turned deadly pale, and placing his finger on his lip, glanced anxiously at the door through which his wife had left the room.

"I think we had better speak on this subject first in the office, if you please," said Jasper, rising; but the moment he had done so the chamber door opened, and Mrs. Jellifer entered the room.

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It was her custom to mix in all business transactions, and consequently, when absent as a matter of form, her ear was at a hole in the wall, and nothing which was said escaped her.

"Didn't I hear you call me, Jasper?" she asked; "I thought I heard my name."

"I was *about* to call you," said Jasper, forcing a grim smile, "as Mr. Spraggatt had requested to see you."

Mrs. Jellifer muttered some words in reply, and then sat down with her back to the window, whilst Jasper endeavoured to appear as unconcerned as possible. Jack Spraggatt, then, with more than his usual circumstantiality, narrated his meeting with Raymond Ray, and as he described the wretchedness of the convict's appearance, the miseries he had known, the unceasing suffering which ended only in death, Mrs. Jellifer sobbed aloud. Jasper's features became so rigid and dark, they seemed to have turned to iron.

"A day or two before Raymond's death," continued Jack, "he made me promise that should I return to England, I would look you up, Mr.

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Jellifer, and place this letter in your hands. I do so now. Please read it while I am here."

He rose, and walked to the window, in order that Jasper might not feel himself observed.

The letter was rather a long one, and Jasper read it over to himself rapidly. When he had ended, he folded it again, and put it away in his pocket, saying:

"You know the contents of this letter, I presume, Mr. Spraggatt?"

"Not a word," replied Jack, "although I remember he said that it might concern me in some way. Does it?"

"Not in the least!" said Jasper. "It merely relates to his unfortunate condition, and contains his remembrances to me and my wife. I am sure we are greatly obliged by the trouble you have taken to bring it so far, and for your kindness to—him!"

"Yes—very grateful, Mr. Spraggatt," added Mrs. Jellifer, her voice full of tears. "He deserved a better fate, poor fellow! poor Raymond!"

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Jack had no desire to continue his visit and remain a spectator of the grief of Mrs. Jellifer, as it was evidently sincere—and therefore he took his leave, promising to see Jasper on the morrow.

As Jasper did not return up-stairs, after showing Jack out through the office, Mrs. Jellifer went in search of her husband, and found him in his little room, again reading Ray's letter, which he folded up at her approach, and replaced in his pocket.

"Let me see that letter, Jasper, please," said Mrs. Jellifer, her voice made almost musical by her grief.

"You had better not read it, my dear. Its contents I have told you—only omitting one matter, and which, I am sure, you will not blame me for concealing. The poor fellow, no doubt, was very weak before he died, and was thankful for Spraggatt's kindness, and all that, and so he requests me to give that gentleman £200. Why, Mr. Spraggatt would have felt insulted had I offered such a thing; for, as you heard, he has made an enormous fortune!—an enormous fortune!"

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What a strange conflict went on in the mind of Mrs. Jellifer! Her love of money contended with her love for the dead man, and a desire to fulfil his last request; but Jasper continuing to set before her their own interests against the sentimentalism of Ray's letter, Mammon prevailed, and she gave a silent consent to her husband's reticence.

"It is strange that he never wrote to us before, Jasper, is it not? So often, too, as you urged him to do so. Poor Raymond! I should like to read the letter—the last I shall ever see of my only brother!"

"Not now, Barbara—not now! You had better not—indeed"—continued Jasper, as his wife urged her request. "I shall not let you read it now. I am going out this evening, at eight o'clock, on business, so let us have tea as soon as you can, as I have accounts to prepare before I go."

Mrs. Jellifer merely replied "Very well," but it was apparent from her look and manner that her purpose was unchanged, and that she would see that letter, as she was now convinced

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hope has often left me, and I have been made so desperate, that I could have braved anything but death to have escaped from my miserable thoughts. Hope, however, came again, and I went on trusting that the next mail would bring me some line from you, some means of lightening the load of wretchedness, which left me no rest day or night. None came. Why has this been? My fellow-convicts had letters from home, why was there not one for me through all these miserable years? I wrote and wrote. Surely one of them must have reached you, unless, as I sometimes thought, you were dead, for I have never believed, after all which has passed between us, that you could have forgotten or abandoned me. If you have, let me tell you what torture you have inflicted upon me, and be your own consciences my avengers! Jasper, had you received my letters, you would have learned, that by keeping your solemnly sworn faith with me, you would have saved me from living the life of a beast, and given me the means, which were my own, of making myself a place in this country, as hundreds have done before me,

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wherein I should have held up my head again as a man, and been as happy as my crimes and my remorse would have allowed me to have been. Of that twelve hundred pounds of mine which you had in trust for such a chance as befel me, if you had sent me even a half—a quarter, I could have rescued myself from the misery I have undergone. You would have done so, would you not, if my letters had reached you? I will not believe otherwise, even now, when I should have died like a beast in the forest, but for one Christian man. I will not believe that either of you would have kept back what was mine by right and solemn swearing, had you known that it could have bought me a release from cold and hunger, blows and bitter words, which have done their work at last, and begotten disease which is eating away my life minute by minute, and has to be borne under the hardest toil that degraded men are driven to do. At times the thought has beset me, that I have been sold—yes, sold by you for the money you obtained by the deed of sale, and I dare not write what I said

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then—no, Jasper; no, Barbara! I am going to my grave, and I will try to forget all my savage anger.

"Barbara, dear sister, the only one I ever loved, except my mother, you would not have left me to this misery, I am certain. Our lives have been unhappy—guilty and unhappy—and we alone in all the world can find excuses for each other's errors, for we only know who were our early teachers, and to what privations and temptations we were exposed. All the good that was in us was crushed out long before we knew its value; no, not all, one true feeling was left in us—our love for each other. That has never gone from me—and at this last day, perhaps, of my miserable life, I will not believe that it has left you! Dear Barbara! I kiss you with my heart. * * *

"It was a happy chance that made me resolve to go to Mr. Spraggatt, hoping to hear some news of home. He will tell you the wretched being that crawled to his door, and whom he has sheltered, and fed, and taught to die like a human creature. If ever this letter reaches you, he will

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bring it, and it is my dying wish that you give to him £200 of *my money*, to buy some trifle which shall remind him of my gratitude, and, perhaps, induce other honest men to remember that the wretched convict—outcast as he is—is still a man. * * *"

The letter then went on to describe much more that Spraggatt had done for him, and concluded with earnest words, and lofty hopes, which had too solemn a meaning to be lightly read. They were unregarded by the worldly woman to whom they were in part addressed, although the rest of the letter was not.

As Mrs. Jellifer looked upon her sleeping husband, it is truth to own that she would not have grieved if his slumber had been eternal, so bitterly did she resent his treachery to herself, and to her brother Raymond. Jasper had told her, again and again, that no letter had reached him from Ray, and that he concluded her brother was dead, as one of his (Jellifer's) letters, had been returned to him unopened.

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It was clear to her now, that she had been deceived, and much as she had loved money, living only to heap it up for no defined end, but to reckon its increase, she resented her brother's wrong and suffering as though she had been the victim.

From that hour Jasper became to her an object of mistrust and loathing, which needed only one other confirmation of his treachery, to be converted into hatred, that was strong enough to evoke revenge.

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CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN ELMSLEY HAS HIS RENT AUDIT.

When London was busy migrating northward, covering the country and pleasant fields with villas of every denomination, certain long-standing houses, deprived of their gardens and little meadows, became tenantless, or, until the builders razed them, were let to persons who set a low rent against the many discomforts of young streets growing to maturity around them. Many of those condemned houses had been occupied formerly by wealthy people, and commanded a certain respect by the evidences of their former condition, which could be traced on their walls and ceilings, displaying gilded cornices and florid mouldings, whilst without, the weed-grown carriage drives, and lofty iron gates and railings, showed their decadence from a former respectability.

In the dining-room of one of these houses, a

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neat, plainly-attired woman, of between thirty and forty, was ironing what are termed, we believe, "light things." Seated by the open window was her husband, reading a newspaper, borrowed from the neighbouring public-house, and smoking at the same time a meerschaum, almost black, its owner said, "with its burnt offerings of the nicotian weed." He wore slippers, and a dressing gown, carefully patched in many parts, but free from stain everywhere, and altogether his appearance and employment were those of a person who might have lived in the old house in its better days, and decayed with it.

As the ironer paused for a moment to test the temperature of her iron, by holding it near her cheek, she said, in a sweet, pleasant voice, "I wish, Joe, you would step into the next street, and buy the potatoes."

"Elizabeth, my love," replied Captain Elmsley —for it was he,—"Elizabeth, my love, how often am I to request you not to call me Joe? Joseph is my name, and nothing is so vulgar as Joeing and Tomming, and Billing."

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"Vulgar!" and Mrs. Elmsley sighed—"I'm always doing something vulgar! Heaven knows what would become of us if I was as genteel as you, Joseph! There ain't many officers' ladies as would do what I am doing now."

"My love," said Elmsley, tenderly, "I am not blind to your good qualities; you know how foolishly fond, how ridiculously proud I am of you, Elizabeth."

"Proud!" retorted Mrs. Elmsley, with a slight pout, "not much of that, I am thinking. We've been married three years, and you've never crossed the threshold with me half-a-dozen times in the day-time."

"You must not blame me for that," said the Captain, "indeed you must not. Blame society. It's a fashionable axiom that no man now a days can be seen with his wife!"

"Fashion!" cried the lady, drawing down the corners of a rather pretty mouth—"What have we to do with fashion on a little more than a hundred a-year!—or if we have, why don't I go shares? No, I'm a slave, I am."

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"I wish you hadn't said that," replied Elmsley. "Are you not the centre of my affections?—the ivy that has entwined around my heart till it has become part of it?—in fact, are you not my wife?"

"And I might as well be a maid-of-all-work from what I get by it!" answered Mrs. Elmsley —and it really seemed as if she were in the right.

The Captain, however, placed her position in another point of view, by saying: "My love, don't repine; you know nothing of this hollow world—I know too much of it. I love you, Elizabeth, and cannot let you mix in that society which I have proved to be worthless. Your beauty would only excite envy, your virtues detraction, your conjugal affection ridicule. But now, surrounded by your flat irons, clothes horses, and culinary appurtenances, you look the embodiment of domestic felicity."

"Ah! none of your flowery speeches, Mr. Joe, I've had too many of them," said the wife. "Usen't you to tell me about your country-house?"

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"Here it is!" replied the Captain—"there is Primrose Hill—yonder Chalk Farm."

"Your Parks, too!"

"Regent, Hyde, and Green! they're public property, and we are the public," said Elmsley.

Mrs. Elmsley only replied with a contemptuous "Pshaw!" Though we question if she were really angry, for there was a shadow of a smile on her face as she listened to her husband.

"The fact is, my dear," continued the Captain, "you are like a great many other people; you are discontented from the want of a perception of the advantages of your own position."

"My advantages!" cried the lady, with a scornful laugh. "Well! I do like that."

"Are you not the mistress of this mansion?" asked Elmsley.

"Mansion! a ruinous old house that nobody else would live in," answered the wife.

"Never mind, it is yours. Don't you do your own washing?"

"To be sure I do; but what's the advantage of that, Captain Elmsley?"

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"Ah! I thought you did not see it," said the husband; "I'll show you. Your linen is always right, nobody wears your stockings but yourself, the basket is always home on a Saturday, and there is no washerwoman's bill to pay, when you have deciphered it."

"Well!" replied Mrs. Elmsley, "there is something in what you say now."

The Captain, thinking to improve his advantage, continued:

"You've the happiness to be your own cook—your own housemaid."

"As I know to my sorrow," was the rejoinder.

"Because you won't perceive the benefits of your situation. Go where I will, every one is grumbling about their domestics. One lady is going out of her mind through Susan: another's driven mad by Mary; no comfort anywhere; for there seems to be an intestine war in every kitchen of the metropolis. You know nothing of this, and is not that a satisfaction?"

Mrs. Elmsley was driven into a corner by this heavy charge of the Captain, and so she deployed

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a little, and said, "Well, but you might take me out sometimes with you, Joseph?"

"Ah, how little do we know in what our real happiness consists!" sighed the Captain. "Were we always together, that beautiful, that ecstatic feeling which we now experience, would be no longer ours."

"What feeling?" asked the wife, in surprise.

"What feeling!" cried the Captain. "The pleasure of meeting after absence. Were we always together, we should hate each other!"

"La, Joe!" exclaimed his wife, alarmed.

"True! What gives people the yellow fever, and destroys their livers in India? The blazing perpetual sun! Nothing but sun won't do. You see what I mean? Kiss me! Take my word, Elizabeth, you're a happy woman, though you don't know it."

Fort Elizabeth surrendered, and saluted the Captain, who thought it generous to change the conversation in which he had obtained such a splendid victory; and, therefore, he asked, "Have you seen our lodgers this morning?"

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Mrs. Elmsley replied, that she had not spoken to them, but had noticed the gentleman go out rather early, adding, "They seem to be very respectable, though poor. Ah! Joe, we are not the worst off in the world, are we?"

"No, my love; and I am glad you believe me at last—There! Go, my darling, and buy your potatoes."

"Well, I suppose I must," said the Captain's lady, laughing, and putting on her bonnet; "for I never see a man hate to do any thing useful as you do."

"She is quite right," thought Elmsley, as his wife left the room, "and my progenitor ought to blush in his grave for the smallness of my annuity. Poor Elizabeth, she is a very good wife, and much more economical than a servant."

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, and on desiring the applicant to come in, Florence Norwold entered the room.

Elmsley instantly rose, and received her with much politeness and without embarrassment, as they had frequently met since she and her

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husband had been tenants of the old dilapidated rooms up-stairs. They had occupied the lodgings nearly a month, and their introduction to the Captain had been simple enough.

When Edward left his father's house, he returned to his wife's former lodgings, which were fortunately vacant, and there he remained for some time vainly endeavouring to find occupation by which he could earn an independent subsistence. It had been easy to say, "I will depend upon myself;" but none know, save those who have passed through the depressing ordeal, how difficult it is to emerge from respectable poverty to respectable independence. The honest labourer finds many uses for his brawn and sinews, but the poor nameless toiler, who has only his bright intellect to offer in the market-place, finds often scanty employment and small reward. Edward Norwold was no exception to this too common condition of the mental workman, and he soon determined to husband most carefully the little wealth he had, so that the struggle might be prolonged to the utmost, as he

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was convinced that the parents of his wife had resented the step she had taken, and abandoned her to the fate she had chosen. He tried manfully and hopefully to find some way to competency, but without success, and at last he determined to risk the rejection of a drama which had been the work of his former leisure. Unacquainted with the usages of a theatre, he put his little manuscript into his pocket, and proceeded at once to Mr. Weaver, one of the most popular managers of the day.

He was puzzled to find an entrance to the spacious theatre, and was rather disappointed at discovering that it had to be made through a small door, in a back street, around which were men in faded wardrobes, grouped idly, it seemed, but who were waiting to be summoned to the performance of their duties, as the rehearsal, then in progress within, proceeded.

Edward was rather abashed at having to face this group, as those comprising it eyed him with undisguised curiosity, and observed a profound silence when he requested to see the manager.

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A man occupying a dingy corner just within the entrance, from which the reek of some savoury mess came forth provokingly, assured him that Mr. Weaver was engaged, and would continue to be so all day; but if the gentleman would leave his business, it should be communicated in due course.

Edward was embarrassed. He was ashamed—he knew not why—to declare himself an author, seeking an interview with so great a man as the manager of the —— Theatre, and therefore he replaced his manuscript in his pocket, thanking the man, and promising to call again in a day or two.

Whilst he had been thus engaged, a gentleman had looked in at the door, and asked, "Anything for me, Jackson?"

A small piece of paper was handed to him, with somebody's compliments, and Edward would not have noticed him again, but for a vague fancy which beset him, that he also was an author, as he looked so gentlemanly, and yet so faded. When they passed out into the street together,

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their eyes met, and Edward's face must have betrayed the anxiety that possessed him, as Captain Elmsley felt compelled to address him.

"A thousand pardons, sir," he said; "but I am about to be impertinent enough to ask, if you are not an author?"

"I have no reason to deny that I am aspiring to such a position," replied Edward, glad of any sympathy, and there was kindness in the Captain's tones.

"I fancied I saw a MS. in your hand when I looked in at the stage-door just now. It was a piece which you are anxious to submit to the manager, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Edward, "you have surmised correctly."

"My dear sir, you have set yourself a task for Tantalus," said the Captain. "You will wear out your boots, and your patience, however large the stock, before your desired end can be obtained by the means you are proposing for its accomplishment. No blame to the manager. A thousand calls a week are made at that stage-

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door. Rely upon it, without a friend at court, or a letter of introduction, you'll find all to be 'labour lost.'"

Edward looked very grave at this statement, the truth of which he had no reason to doubt, and he would have returned home, sorrowful enough, had not Elmsley said, "I'm afraid I'm an impertinent fellow, but as I read Gentleman in your face, and perhaps something else, which interests me, I shall be glad to be of service to you, if you will allow me. I am known to a great many persons connected with the theatres, and it is not improbable but I might find one or two to concern themselves for you, as they are a good-natured race, and never hesitate to do any one a good turn when they can."

"I am really greatly obliged," replied Edward, "and most willingly accept your kind offices."

"I am compelled to add a condition, which I trust will not be objectionable. It is proper that I should know something of your piece, and I will gladly meet your convenience, to hear it read,"

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said Elmsley. "I cannot ask you to my chambers —as at present they are out of repair."

"Pray make no excuse to me," replied Edward, "my lodgings are close at hand, and if I might beg such a favour, will you come at once and allow me to inflict my tediousness upon you?"

Captain Elmsley cast his eye up to the clock of St. Martin's church, and, after a brief calculation of the time and his own obligations, consented to accompany the young author and sit in judgment upon his first-born.

Florence was delighted to see the cheerful face of her husband, and received the cause of it so genially, that the Captain's interest increased considerably. A slight luncheon, and then the reading of that great work, to whose eloquent scenes of passion, love, and pathos Florence was never tired of listening, or of repeating; for she so loved the minstrel, that every touch of his had become a memory. At least, so Florence said, when Edward had left the room, and Elmsley was desirous to recall some passage which had pleased him, and which Florence quoted instantly.

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Elmsley was honest in his criticism of what he had heard, and whilst commending it very highly, he pointed out a few imperfections which had reference principally to its construction for the purposes of the stage, and for which his experience readily suggested a remedy.

Before the Captain took his leave, Edward had informed him of his uneasy position, and his desire to earn and economise. Elmsley said nothing then of the accommodation of his suburban mansion, as he was always careful to conceal his place of residence; but when he became better acquainted with Edward and Florence, and more interested in their fortunes, he confided to them his own peculiar state of life, and advised them to share his seclusion and its economical advantages.

The Captain's proposal was readily accepted, and Edward having invested a very few pounds in the purchase of some additional furniture for the two rooms, which Elmsley usually let, made them, by the aid of Florence's good taste, soon resume something of their old appearance under more prosperous tenancy.

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"I am somewhat late to-day, Captain Elmsley," said Florence with a smile, placing some money on the table; "but I have been watching the return of Mr. Norwold, until the business of the morning escaped me. He left home with great expectations of obtaining a clerkship in the city."

"Really, madam," said Elmsley, covering the money with his hand, "I am almost ashamed to receive this sum."

"Why so, my dear sir?" replied Florence, smiling again, "no gentleman need be ashamed of his rent-roll, however small; and we are happy to have found such a very considerate landlord."

"Well, my poverty and not my will consents," said Elmsley; "but should Mr. Norwold find his balance at his banker's inconveniently low at any time, I trust that he will consider me a friend, and make this poor house his home until brighter days return."

Florence was touched by this rhetorical flourish of her needy landlord, and thanked him with "nods and becks, and wreathed smiles," as she

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felt it difficult to find words at the moment, and then left the room.

When she had departed, and Mrs. Elmsley had returned from her marketing, the Captain completed his toilet, and having ascertained that a shoulder of mutton was to be added to the potatoes, promised to return to dinner at five o'clock. As he left the house he saw Norwold approaching, his eyes bent upon the ground, and his step slow and hesitating. Elmsley, therefore, conjectured that his morning's expectations had not been realised; and having no consolation to offer him, the Captain made a detour and avoided him.

"No success, Florence," said Edward, as he entered the room. "My want of experience again the objection. It is really disheartening. Very."

"It must be, dear boy," replied Florence, placing her arms around his neck and kissing him; "but we must hope on, and strive on, as you used to say when we anticipated this struggle. No evil has come but what we have thought possible;

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and all that we have hoped may follow—will follow, I should have said—if we strive patiently."

"There is some comfort in what you say, darling," said Edward, "and I will not despond, but take new courage from this bright face and loving look, and believe that to-morrow will bring us nearer to the end of this 'hope deferred.' Aha!" he continued cheerily, when he had gone to his writing-table, "so you have been copying for me, and really made pleasant reading of what, in my abominable scrawl, seemed to be detestable nonsense. I wish the Editor could have seen the pretty hand tracing these lines, its beauty might have dazzled him and hidden the poverty of the thoughts which are attached to these pot-hooks and hangers."

A little box on the ear and a kiss on the forehead were his punishments for such nonsense, and, had it been possible, he would never have talked more wisely, but have continued to deserve such reproofs. There was work to be done, however, and so putting by his walking-coat carefully, and assuming one less presentable out of doors, he

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sought, by the aid of pen, ink, and paper, to coin his thoughts into drachmas.

An hour or so had passed, when Elmsley entered his house and surprised his wife by the pleasing excitement which was depicted in his countenance.

"Elizabeth, my dear," he said, not regarding her mute wonder, "is there a sheet of note-paper in the house?"

"Dear me, Joe, I don't think there is," replied the lady; "but what has happened?"

"You shall know presently—but I want some note-paper. Ah! here is a sheet," said the Captain, rummaging the pocket of an old writing-case; "and now, my dear, I am going to invite the Norwolds to dinner. We have a baked shoulder of mutton, four silver forks and a gravy-spoon. Whilst I write the note, you ask Mrs. Jackson at the next house to lend us her little girl to deliver it."

"La! Joe, what nonsense!" cried Mrs. Elmsley. "Ask them to dinner and welcome, but what need of a note and Mrs. Jackson's girl, and all that fuss?"

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"My dear," replied the Captain, "I wish the Norwolds to be assured that we know the rules of polite society, and are not neglectful of the usual *etiquette*."

"Then you'll dine without me, Joe," said the lady. "If there is to be any of that *ettyket* as you call it, I shan't be able to eat a morsel, and I won't sit at my own table looking like a goose. If Mr. and Mrs. Norwold will take me as I am, well and good. I shall be delighted to see them, but if onion-sauce is not good enough for them with shoulder of mutton, why I shall leave you to serve it up with *ettyket*."

The Captain knew his lady well enough not to perceive that she was in earnest; and whenever she arrived at that condition of mind, he had found from long experience, that it was conducive to domestic harmony to allow her to have her own way.

"Be it as you please, my dear Elizabeth," said Elmsley; "you shall deliver our compliments to our lodgers, and say that as I hope to have an important and pleasurable communication to

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make to Mr. Norwold, we shall be delighted if they will honour us and our shoulder of mutton with their company."

"Oh, I can't remember all that rigmarole, Joe, I'm sure; but I will run up and ask them to dinner, and you can make as many flowery speeches as you like afterwards," replied Mrs. Elmsley.

The Norwolds made but slight objection to dining with their friends, and the Captain's lady returned to make the necessary preparations for their reception, resolved to convince Joe that her onion-sauce was better than his *ettyket*.

It was as good as a transformation scene in a pantomime to see with what rapidity the shoulder and its attendant potatoes were transferred from the brown pan and the baker's tray to the cleanest of blue dishes, and placed on the pure white table-cloth, which glittered with the family plate. And then it was equally surprising to observe how Mrs. Captain Elmsley disappeared through the bedroom door with a somewhat heated face, disordered cap, and slightly stained dress, to return "in a brace of shakes," as she

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promised she would do, decked in the smartest of caps and the neatest of gowns, ready to do the honours of her humble hospitable table, after the Captain, in a playful manner, had bawled "Dinner is served! Coming down, Mr. and Mrs. Norwold!" So the dinner, beginning with a simple jest, was made a merry one by the pleased and contented guests reciprocating from the bottom of their hearts the truthful welcome and friendliness of their entertainers.

When Mrs. Elmsley had cleared away, Florence helping her, though under much protest, and a jug of cold punch of the Captain's brewing had been placed upon the table, Elmsley rose with great apparent solemnity, and spoke as follows:—

"Ladies, before Mr. Norwold and myself proceed to tobacco, which delicious weed, I understand, one lady admires, and I know that the other adores, I wish to mention a fact which I think will make the incense more agreeable, and the punch more acceptable. I now produce a missive of some importance, which reached my hands today, but whose contents I did not communi-

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cate to any one at the beginning of our limited banquet, fearing that it might take away the breath of some of us, and the appetites of others. With your permission, I will read to you a note from that distinguished actor, and my esteemed friend, Rupert Merville, who writes from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, and is pleased to address me as my dear old friend and captain.

"I have more pleasure than I can express in the few moments I have at command between the acts, in communicating to you that Mr. Weaver is as much delighted with your friend's drama as I was, and will see you both to-morrow evening, if you will call upon him during play-hours, as he enacts——"

The Captain did not over-estimate the importance of his communication, as poor Florence uttered a little cry, and fainted quietly away into the arms of Mrs. Elmsley, and Edward was so bewildered that he sprinkled his darling's pallid face with the cold punch, making her eyes smart for some minutes after her recovery.

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And was it not a dream? Florence thought. Was her dear clever husband about to become famous, to proclaim to the selfish father that had discarded him what a noble son he had never sought to know and appreciate? To tell to those so dear, the dearest of all but one in the wide world, that she had not chosen unworthily, nor forgotten her proper course of duty without the great excuse to be found in the excellence which had enthralled her. Father, mother, Uncle Jack! would read of his triumph, and take her to their hearts again, and him also! Success was so certain.

Such was the estimate that silly Florence entertained of her husband's genius, now about to dazzle the world by aid of the footlights of a theatre. So the Captain was right. The incense and the libation were more acceptable for the revelation of the oracle.

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CHAPTER III.

JACK SPRAGGATT TRANSACTS BUSINESS WITH LADY NORWOLD.

JACK SPRAGGATT and Warner sat long in conference in the agent's gloomy office in the City, after the former had detailed the particulars of his conversation with Jasper Jellifer. Warner had always such loving faith in Florence, that he could not believe she had married any one that was not worthy of her; and now that Herr Dortz had been so lavish in the praise of M. Edward, his pupil and his friend, he had forgiven his beloved child long ago, and craved with all his heart to call her home. Hitherto his search had been in vain, but he was strong in hope, and was, therefore, most desirous to restore her husband to his proper place again, in despite of the bad man with whom they both claimed such close kindred.

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The sense of wrong which in his own case he had endeavoured to extinguish by all the means that Christian men employ for such a charitable end, returned to stimulate him to do battle for his children, and he resolved to compel restitution at any sacrifice almost.

But how to proceed? His long absence from England, his change of name, and his brother's possession of the hereditary lands and title, made the task most difficult. He was, however, convinced that an outlet would be found, or this strange union would not have been brought about by such an unlooked-for accident. Was this extraordinary want of Lady Norwold's to be a means to the great end? It might be. Might she not fail to repay the money she sought to borrow, and so become a compelled agent to work in some way, unseen at present, the accomplishment of his desires? The security she offered—diamonds—Jasper said, might comprise the tangible evidence that the past had lied and done a wrong which was to be atoned for in the present.

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The links of the chain might have been severed, but not lost; and Jasper and Gilbert's wife and himself were destined, perhaps, to unite them again! The money would be as dross to such a consummation.

Jack Spraggatt, therefore, called again upon Jasper, and gratified him greatly by confiding to him certain merchandise to dispose of on "commission;" for our honest friend could not consent to break faith, even with such a man as Jasper Jellifer. He then said:—

"I have been talking with a friend over your other proposal—I mean the advance of money to Lady Norwold. The interest she would pay, I think you said, would be twenty per cent."

"Less my commission. Yes," said Jasper.

"Well, it can be done, provided the diamonds are of adequate value; and that you vouch for—?" asked Jack.

"No, no! I vouch for nothing," replied Jellifer. "I believe the diamonds are family matters, and therefore I conclude of value, or they would not have been preserved."

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"The family diamonds," thought Jack, "that sounds well for Warner's purpose."

"The interest, as I said, is large," continued Jasper, fearing that some difficulty was presenting itself; "and the pledge must be redeemed very soon, as her ladyship always gives a great party on Sir Gilbert's birthday—nobody knows why but herself. Then they would be missed by her husband, who has a sharp eye for such matters."

"Well, it shall be done, Jellifer!" said Jack. "If you and her ladyship will call on me to-morrow at this address"—(he gave him a card of the agent)—"a friend shall meet you with the money."

"Is the presence of her ladyship necessary?" asked Jasper. "She is a proud woman, and would perhaps decline such a visit."

"Then she may keep her diamonds, and we will keep our money," replied Jack. "The matter is in your hands, Mr. Jellifer. At twelve o'clock to-morrow I shall expect you, unless I hear from you before that time. Good day, Mr. Jellifer."

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When Jack reached the street he gave himself a rough shake, as though he had been in contact with some unclean thing and was fearful of contagion. He had never in the days of his innocency liked Jasper, and now that he had some experience of the world and its wickedness, he more than doubted that Jasper Jellifer was a great rogue, and one, too, that he was destined to unmask, whenever it was worth the trouble of doing so.

As Jasper conjectured, Lady Norwold was very indignant when she heard of Jack's requirement, and vowed for some time that she would not go, and that Jasper must find other means of meeting her necessities or lose Sir Gilbert's favour. He had none, he protested again and again, and succeeded at last in reconciling her ladyship to the indignity of personally receiving the money in the city. It had been so arranged with Warner, who felt a strong desire to be a witness of the humiliation of his brother's wife; but when the hour approached for the fulfilment of this wish, Lucy's better

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nature prevailed over him, and he deputed Jack to receive her ladyship, an office which that gentleman accepted with the utmost reluctance.

A note from Jasper announced Lady Norwold's acceptance of Mr. Spraggatt's terms, and that her ladyship would be in the City about twelve o'clock. Jack waited impatiently long past that time, until the neighbouring church clock chimed the hour of two, and then, as he was preparing to leave the office, her ladyship and Mr. Jellifer were driven up to the door in a hackney carriage. Nothing could exceed Jasper's obsequiousness as he ushered Lady Norwold into the little counting-house, and it was evident the haughty lady was not in the most amiable mood. Jack was glad of that; he did not mind a woman in her rough temper, but he had lived so much alone in the Bush, and in such easy society when out of it, that he would have been embarrassed had he had to have encountered a lady of fashion in her superfine manners.

"What a dismal hole!" said her ladyship, as she surveyed the little room where Jack was

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standing to receive her. "I had no idea that money was made in such a gloomy dungeon. 'Pon my word, I excuse your twenty per cent. Well, sir," addressing Jack, "are you the person who has put me to this inconvenience?"

"I am here, my lady," replied Jack, "at the request of Mr. Jellifer, to lend somebody three thousand pounds on certain jewels."

"Well, am I to stand throughout the business, Mr. Jellifer? Or am I to mount upon that pedestal?" said her ladyship, pointing to one of the high office-stools; for Jack had omitted to provide a chair.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Jasper; "how very inconsiderate, Mr. Spraggatt! Her ladyship never can mount that stool."

"Her ladyship can do anything she pleases, Mr. Jellifer," replied her ladyship, seating herself on the high stool, and displaying her pretty feet and ankles. "Now, sir, as this position is neither comfortable nor graceful, let us proceed with our business. Where are the diamonds, Jellifer? Have you made a list of them?"

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Jasper produced the various jewel-cases from a blue bag, and he had made a list.

"There, sir, are the most valuable of my jewels, and I beg that they may be kept in a secure place, as some of them are heir-looms, and very much prized in the family. Jellifer, get me a glass of water, whilst Mr. What's-his-name counts out the money."

Jasper went in pursuit of the water, and Jack counted over the crisp bank-notes, their music seeming to have a soothing effect upon the high-seated lady. Jasper returned with the water, and her ladyship having slaked her thirst, received the money, which she reckoned with facility and correctness, proving that she was not unused to such calculations.

"Quite right, sir," she said, "and I hope these notes will bring me better fortune than some I had of Mr. Jellifer lately. I am afraid, Jellifer, your money comes from low people, and is anxious to get out of good society as fast as it can; for of the two thousand pounds you ad-

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vanced to me on my next year's dividends, not a pound remained after a week at *piquet*."

So Jasper had lent her ladyship two thousand pounds; he was rich enough for that, thought Jack. On her ladyship's dividends, too, the cunning old fellow!

"Well, sir," continued her ladyship, addressing Jack, "as I have the money and you have the diamonds, permit me to inquire why I have been dragged, at this unreasonable hour, into this dungeon of a place?"

"Your ladyship must sign, if you please, this bond, in further acknowledgment of the loan," said Jasper, producing a written form.

"And your character stands so high with Mr. What's-his-name, that he required to have it signed in his own presence. Eh! Mr. Jellifer! Here, help me down from this bad eminence." But without waiting for the solicited assistance, her ladyship regained the floor.

As she was signing the acknowledgment, the words she had addressed to Jellifer came back

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into the mind of Jack Spraggatt, and he never got them out again; no, never!

Having completed the bond, Lady Norwold, after giving Jack a stately "good morning," left the office, preceded by Jasper, who returned, however, for a moment, to pop his head in at the office-door, and say:

"I'll call in the morning for my commission, Mr. Spraggatt, if you'll please to leave it out for me;" and then he disappeared to escort his imperious employer through the wilderness of the City.

Jack hastened to Warner with the coveted jewels, and displayed them before him. There were necklaces that had been at many Norwold bridals, encircling round white throats which had grown wrinkled within their embrace until death unloosed the clasps, and then another bride perhaps, and another crone became possessors. Bracelets that had enclosed wrists long since pulseless, but not the one for which Warner sought, and against which all the other glittering stones were reckoned worthless. No,

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not all—for there were some one or two ornaments which he remembered or fancied he remembered his mother to have worn. Old Nurse Bland had made him familiar with them perhaps, and he looked upon them as memorials of the mother whom he had lost so young, and who had bequeathed her maternal love to one who left home and kindred in the hour of his great need, to pay it back to him. As soon as he had overcome his emotion and disappointment, he insisted upon Lucy putting on the ornaments which had been his mother's, so that for an hour at least she should be my Lady Norwold. He then told the legends connected with many of these family relics, and Lucy saw how closely his heart still clung to the honours of the house which he had abandoned so recklessly. She foresaw that the storm which had shown itself "no bigger than a man's hand" in the distant colony, was coming up slowly but surely, gathering its rain, its thunders, and its lightnings from all that passed around it. She dreaded sometimes that it would destroy the happiness of their domestic life, frightening away

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the content and peace which had been their household gods so long; but then she knew that the destroying fire of heaven could be turned aside by skill and forethought—and so she prepared herself to baffle the tempest when it came, and to shield those whom she loved from perishing in the strife.

When Warner had gathered together the family heir-looms which had come into his possession so strangely, he left the room to put them in some place of security. Lucy instantly approached her brother, and laid her hand fondly on his shoulder, as he sat with his arms crossed on the back of his chair and looking out of window. Jack cocked up his ear, as he guessed some important question was about to be raised.

"It is most unfortunate, Jack," said Lucy, "that no tidings can be gained of our children; most unfortunate at this crisis, for I foresee one."

"So do I," replied Jack.

"I am certain that man Jellifer could put us upon their track if he would."

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"So am I," answered Jack.

"He will not do so without he is paid for his information," said Lucy.

"He wont," replied her brother.

"Now, you must go to him at once, Jack, and make terms with him at any cost."

"Just what I was thinking when you touched my shoulder," replied Jack. "I am to see him to-morrow."

"To-morrow is a very long way off, my dear brother," said Lucy, "now that we are measuring years of our future destiny by every tick of the clock. Try and find him this night; buy from him the least hint that he will sell you, as I fear his own interest is so connected with his bad master that he will not risk much for us at present. Hereafter he may be ready to give himself away. You will go."

"At once," said Jack, rising. "Bid Warner good day, as I shall not return until to-morrow should I hear no satisfactory tidings from Jellifer."

Jack, it will be remembered, had already made

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Jasper an offer of fifty pounds; but of this he had said nothing to Warner or to his sister, fearing to awaken hopes which would not be realised; and he now, in accordance with Lucy's wish, went direct to Jasper's house, resolved to buy whatever the commission agent might have to sell.

Jasper was at home, and apparently no way disturbed by the absence of his wife, who had gone, as she sometimes did, as his representative, to receive certain rents due at Morden. Had he known what that journey was to cost him, he would have sat upon red hot coals rather than have rested calmly on the easy chair which he occupied, when Jack-in-the-box introduced Mr. Spraggatt to him.

Jack went at once to the subject which had brought him to Jasper's office so late in the afternoon, and saw, shortsighted as he was at times, that Jasper could sell information of some sort.

"Mr. Jellifer," said Jack, "I have now told you my business, and I am sure you can be of service. Will you?"

"He-he-m-hem!" grunted Jasper.

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"Don't he-m-hem with me," said Jack; "you will make a better bargain by speaking out. What is it sticks in your throat, man?" as Jasper repeated his impediment. "Out with it. If it is an increase of reward, and you feel ashamed to ask it, write it down; the ink won't turn red, I'll be bound."

"The same man as ever. The same man," said Jasper. "You will have your joke, Mr. Spraggatt, although we are upon business. Well, sir, I can give you a clue to those imprudent young people, but I run a tremendous risk in doing so."

"How much?" said Jack—"£100?"

"Say £150," replied Jasper, "and I'll risk it."

"A bargain," cried Jack.

"Although, mind, I cannot assure you that any good will come out of my information, I shall expect to be paid all the same," said Jasper.

Jack dived into the side-pocket of his coat, and producing a roll of notes proceeded to count them into two piles of seventy-five pounds each.

"There, Mr. Jellifer," he said, "I know there

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are certain men who very properly are distrustful of other men's words, and you seem to be one of them. Take that lot of notes, put them into your pocket, now button it up. You have them safe, have you not? Now open your lips, tell me what you like, and I shall be satisfied. Tell me anything about Mr. Norwold, and this lot is yours also. That's fair, I hope?"

Jasper called it not only fair, but liberal in the extreme, and he then ventured to tell Jack that he had learned from the man who saw the governess and Mr. Edward out of the house, that the hackney coachman was told to drive to some number in Colchester Street, Manchester Square, and that was all he had to communicate.

"It does not seem much, Mr. Spraggatt, for £150," said Jellifer, as he received the other half of the notes, "and would not be worth the money, but for the risk I run of offending Sir Gilbert, who has forbidden anyone connected with him directly or indirectly to mention the name of his son."

Whilst Jasper was delivering himself of this

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excuse Jack had risen, put on his hat, and reached the door of the room.

"Mr. Jellifer, you are quite right. You have not communicated a great deal of information for your money, but I am satisfied, and much good may your gains do you. It is by such shifts as yours that some men grow rich, and then, remembering the price they have paid all their lives long for their money, they get to love it, and sometimes to die for it. Good evening." *Exit* Jack.

"Love it!" cried Jasper, clutching the remaining pile of notes in both hands. "Love it! What else is there worth loving? What else does not change or leave you as you grow old? But money increases more and more the longer we live and use it wisely. Die for it! That depends upon circumstances." Jasper did not quite like that figure of speech as well as the other—but he added after a pause, "Yes—I think I could die for it—that is, I would defend what I have with my life, and I should die to lose it."

It is said that as the doomed man passes beneath the headsman's axe the metal becomes

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sentient, and rings, as it were, the first notes of his knell. So, as Jasper thought this, he discovered he had a hole in his pocket, through which a bad half-crown stole down to the knee of his breeches, and fell with a dishonest jingle upon the hearthstone on which he was standing.

Jack Spraggatt having reached Colchester Street commenced his inquiry by knocking at Number One, and continued unsuccessful in discovering any clue to Mr. Norwold until he had arrived at Number Twenty-seven, when he learned that about two months before a gentleman and his wife had occupied the drawing-room floor at one guinea and a half a-week, kitchen fire and boot-cleaning extra, but had left, it was supposed, from motives of economy; as comfort they confessed to, and every attention that the most fastidious could desire. They appeared to have expected the arrival of some letters from abroad, and it was not until two mails had arrived without bringing the looked-for communication that they gave a week's warning, and went away to some place near Primrose Hill; the exact address was

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forgotten, which was unfortunate, as a letter post-marked Algeriè came soon after their departure, but the postman took it away again when he found that Mr. Norwold had left Colchester Street. A party had called the night before to make the inquiry after Mr. Norwold, and given the name of—"Jellybag."

"Jellifer?" suggested Jack.

"Yes, Jellifer; that was the name. And said he was a friend of the family."

So, then, Mr. Jasper could have given Mr. Spraggatt a more definite address than some number in Colchester Street, and it was unwise in him not to have done so, as he set Jack thinking earnestly what his motive could be for trying to keep him and Mr. Norwold apart.

The information Jack had received was valuable, however, so far that it narrowed the circle of inquiry, and he resolved to take counsel in the morning with his new ally, Vincent Elliott, before he communicated what had transpired either to Warner or Lucy. As he walked homewards, Jasper Jellifer came continually into his mind,

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"If you have been a cold, treacherous villain, then you will, by the means of this last act of my wretched life, be rewarded also, and as you well deserve to be."

"Aha!" thought Jack, "I was sure that Jasper was a scoundrel, and I am destined to expose the rascal."

"Now note particularly what I write," the paper read on. "In Morden church-yard, on the south side of the church, nearly opposite the chancel window, is the grave of Godfred Mason. At the back of his head-stone I buried, years ago, a small box, containing certain matters which will repay anyone for the search. It is not likely that the box has been discovered, as there was only a small space between Mason's headstone and the footstone of the adjoining grave. The search had better be made secretly, as the contents of the box may be used for good or evil, Jasper; and whichever chances to you, it will come by your own act and deed, and as you have dealt fairly or foully with Raymond Ray."

Jack Spraggatt was fairly puzzled when he had

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finished this extraordinary document, and felt as though he were taking part in some terrific melodrama, and expected to hear chains clank, and bolts rattle, and to smell brimstone. There was nothing so singular after all, he thought, when he had read the musty paper again. Ray had been concerned in many nefarious schemes, and was not unlikely to have prepared for some contingency which might arise, and in which this buried box might be of service. So Jack determined to run down to Morden quietly very soon, and ascertain if this hidden treasure was to be recovered.

Mrs. Jellifer, we know, had started for Morden early in the day. She had taken her seat in a second-class carriage, divided into compartments, but open at the top, so that two men who were conversing at one end could be heard by Mrs. Jellifer, who was seated at the other. They were evidently well versed in the criminal history of the day, and at last their conversation became so interesting to Mrs. Jellifer, that when the train stopped at two stations short of Morden, and the men got out, Mrs. Jellifer could not con-

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tinue her journey, but left the carriage also, following them to their inn; and, after a brief conversation with one of them, invited them to a supper of roast ducks, so highly seasoned, that unlimited brandy-and-water was needful to stimulate and preserve the digestion of the partakers of this savoury banquet.

Jasper Jellifer, although he had added more than a hundred pounds to his hoard that day, supped off a crust of bread and a slice of Dutch cheese, and retired to rest at ten o'clock. Oh, Jasper! Jasper! what a hideous nightmare; a horrid, starveling demon should have sat upon the coverlet of your bed throughout that night. Mrs. Jellifer has mounted it, and will ride it home before your life has ended.

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CHAPTER IV.

EDWARD NORWOLD DISCOVERS A NEW WORLD.

About six o'clock one afternoon, a small doorway in a large building presented no inapt resemblance to the entrance of a bee-hive. Over it was painted "Stage-door." The first to approach it were some twelve or fourteen men, apparently mechanics, more or less dusty in their attire, and who sauntered in leisurely, after extinguishing the pipes which some of them had been smoking. These were the stage-carpenters and gasmen. Then came about the same number of men and women, generally dressed in the left-off wardrobes of persons in a better station of life, and to which they seemed to have succeeded as perquisites of office: the "dressers," or attendants of the actors, no doubt. To them succeeded young girls, usually by twos and threes, each carrying a little basket, the contents of which it

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would be impertinent to analyse. There was no mistaking the ladies of the ballet and the chorus singers, the more especially as they were politely recognised by sundry gentlemen who came at the same time, and were known as the gentlemen of the chorus and the "young men" of the establishment. At intervals other ladies and gentlemen arrived, all evidently of some importance, as many of the bystanders touched their hats, and made way for them to enter the little door. They resembled ordinary mortals, except that the men were whiskerless and the ladies generally had their faces concealed behind thick veils. In a little while they were to be converted by the fancy of the dramatist and the skill of the costumier into lords and ladies, patterns of virtue or villany; fairies or demons; men and women of fashion, or clodhoppers and vagabonds. The "principals" without a question, and whose names stood forth in bold type on the playbills. Others passed in, bearing musical instruments; these were distinguished from common men by the length of their hair, a certain poetry of costume, and a

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prevalence of moustache. They were not to be mistaken; they were the "gentle musicians," whose "dulcet strains" would contribute so much to the evening's entertainment. Sundry stragglers made up a hundred or more of human bees, who, in that dramatic hive, gathered honey every opening night, except when they were compelled into unwilling idleness, at the requirement of the State, having to represent the national grief or the national piety at their own expense, to the wonder and admiration of the followers of all other callings whatsoever in modern Babylon.

And there also, about eight of the clock, came Captain Elmsley and his young friend Edward Norwold; but their progress was barred by a low wicket guarded by a proud old porter, who had, in happier times, borne the banners of many renowned kings and chieftains in their bloodless wars and grand processions, and who knew by rote the roll of dramatic celebrities. He could, if required, have recounted the victories and the defeats of the chivalry of the stage. He had fallen to his present low estate by the rapid de-

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velopment of sundry bunions, which produced unsteadiness in his march, and rendered his execution of a "charge" a ludicrous hobble.

Elmsley was a favourite with the porter, as the Captain always treated him with the military respect due to a decayed standard-bearer, and he instantly offered to send the cards of the two gentlemen to the manager as soon as he had left the stage, although such a proceeding was not customary.

Elmsley informed him that they were expected, or they would not have ventured to trespass upon the dramatic potentate at such a time, and on this assurance the porter opened the wicket and admitted the Captain and Norwold to the back of the stage as a more agreeable waiting-room than the passage from the street.

Edward had never been upon the stage of a theatre, and all his notions of that unknown world behind the curtain were connected with the pleasing illusions he had witnessed when seated in the front. He was surprised and disappointed, therefore, to find himself surrounded by objects the most incongruous and unattractive imaginable. Rude daubs

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of colour, whose intention could hardly be defined, but whose artistic combination formed, when seen from a proper distance, those marvellous pictures which so frequently adorn the modern stage. Over his head were large rollers, and wheels, and ropes, giving assurance that hard labour was not unknown in this once seeming fairy-land. A lantern on a pole was doing duty, he was told, for the moon, whilst a grimy man, turning a windlass, over which a strip of blue cloth was strained, produced the waterfall which had elicited on its discovery the plaudits of the delighted spectators. The glare of light everywhere made the rough carpenter's work and the dingy canvas of the backs of the scenery strikingly apparent, and other objects which had conveyed ideas of costly splendour were rendered conspicuously worthless.

The appearance of the actors themselves was by no means improved by this closer inspection, and as they passed to and fro there was a steady business air about them that ill accorded with his pre-conceived notion of actors behind the scenes,

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and which could not have been exceeded by sober city merchants congregated on the Rialto. And so this world in little was more a representation of the great world without than it appears to be to those who are not permitted to test their delusions, and by so doing prove that, as in larger human experience,

> "Pleasures are ever in our hands and eyes,
> And when in act they cease, in prospect rise."

At the end of an act of the play then in progress, a messenger showed the way to the manager's room, and Edward was again surprised at being introduced to a venerable man, ragged as poverty, who received him with the ease of a man of the world and a gentleman.

"I must ask you, Mr. Norwold," said Mr. Weaver, "to excuse, as I am sure my friend Captain Elmsley will, my receiving you in this manner, but my time has been so fully occupied during the day, that I could not make a more convenient appointment, and as our interview is a matter of business, I have not hesitated to ask you here this evening."

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Edward assured him how gratified he had been at his invitation, and Elmsley was profuse in his expressions of obligation.

"I have only a quarter of an hour's wait," said Mr. Weaver, "and therefore I will be brief. I like your drama, Mr. Norwold, and will produce it immediately, if agreeable to you."

Poor Edward's heart beat very fast as he listened to those words of hope, and he could bow only in reply.

"I have ventured to offer a few suggestions for your consideration, and which my experience of stage requirements make me think necessary. They are very few, and very easy of adoption, and I will ask you to look at them presently, when I am on the stage."

Edward thanked him for what he felt must be valuable kindness, and Captain Elmsley warmly approved, without knowing what they were, of any suggestions coming from such a distinguished authority.

"Presuming that no difficulties will arise," continued Mr. Weaver, "I will mention that I

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consider ourselves fortunate in my having engaged a *débutante* who comes highly recommended to me, and to whom I propose to entrust the part of your charming heroine."

Again Edward could only bow, and Elmsley was kept silent by a slight motion of the manager's hand, and a finger directed to the clock on the mantel-piece.

"I am asking you, therefore, Mr. Norwold, to risk a little upon my account as I do upon yours; but I sincerely believe it will be to the advantage of both."

Edward could only say how obliged he was for the opportunity of testing his dramatic powers, as more than his own personal gratification was involved in the experiment.

"I may be deceived," said Mr. Weaver, "for dramatic success can only be ascertained by representation, but I am strongly of opinion that you have not much cause for anxiety."

"Called, sir," said a boy, putting his head into the room without ceremony. "That is my summons to the stage," continued Mr. Weaver.

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"There is your piece, Mr. Norwold. Pens, ink, and paper are on the table, and you may possibly decide upon rejecting or adopting my suggestions by the time the act is over. Captain Elmsley, there is some light claret, there is the cigar-box, and I must leave you to do the honours during my absence."

Edward could hardly believe, when the manager had left the room, that all which he had heard was real, and that he had been listening to Mr. Weaver of the Theatre Royal ——, who had spoken to him like a kindly gentleman and a man of business. Yet before him were the sheets of paper he had worked upon so pleasantly, so earnestly, and which he had resorted to in his need as the means of achieving an independent position for himself and his beloved Florence. As he thought of her his heart beat quickly, and her dear face seemed to look up to him from the open pages upon the table. Elmsley did not attempt to disturb him, but handed him a glass of claret, which was a grateful draught to his feverish lips and parched throat. Edward then turned to

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the pages which Mr. Weaver had marked with slips of paper, and found the proposed alterations so judicious and easy of accomplishment, that before the manager had returned to the room all the verbal changes had been made.

"Captain Elmsley," said Edward, when he had finished writing; "I cannot now express what I would say to you, and to this kind manager, but I will some day. If you could guess the relief I experience by the *hope* only of the success of this drama, you would understand my inability to thank you. Don't speak, please. When I wrote these pages, I did so to please myself with my own fancies, and to find employment for idle hours which would have been otherwise irksome. Of late I have read in these lines almost my future fate. I have recalled them night and day, and tried to estimate their value; now casting them aside as worthless dreamings, then reading them as words of hope that promised emancipation from the miserable doubts which beset the future. The truth is now to be pronounced, the coveted trial appears to be at hand. What will be the verdict?"

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"Success! success!" replied Elmsley, "I am not a bad judge of such matters, and I'll stake my reputation upon success."

The gage was not of much value, but Edward accepted it at once, and met Mr. Weaver on his return with a smiling face.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Manager, "thus far 'have we marched on without impediment,' and I am beginning to feel a little tired," pouring out a glass of claret, "and I will drink to you both, and success to our new drama, eh, Mr. Norwold?"

Edward gladly answered the pledge, assuring the proposer how readily he had been able to accept his suggestions and to take advantage of them.

"Very well," said Mr. Manager, "then we will have the parts copied to-morrow, and on Saturday morning you shall read the piece in the green-room."

"Read the piece?" asked Edward, "to whom?"

"To the actors concerned in it. Don't look

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aghast. It is nothing after the first plunge, I assure you. We are not such formidable critics that you need fear us more than the public," said Mr. Weaver, laughing. "As we are upon business, these are my usual terms. Are they acceptable to you?"

He had written on a slip of paper, "£100, payable after the twentieth night."

Acceptable! £100!

The young author had never placed a definite value upon his labours, although he had associated them with prospective gain; and now that it came before him so palpably, he was scarcely able to realise such a consummation. He was only in the 'prenticeship of authorcraft, and had not as yet been called upon to barter his daily life—like the much-quoted pelican—to rear his literary offspring.

"As I have short 'calls' during the next act," said Mr. Weaver, "perhaps you will come with me to the green-room and learn something more of our life behind the scenes. The Captain is an old *habitué*, I believe."

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Elmsley had certainly been an occasional visitor in former days to the green-room of the Patent Houses when it was more the custom than it is at present for strangers to be admitted to them, and he expressed the pleasure he should have in being again indulged with such a privilege. The Manager led the way into a well-lighted room at the back of the stage. The walls were nearly covered with character portraits of the actors and actresses who had fretted their hours on the stage of that particular theatre, the other space being occupied by large looking-glasses, placed there for the convenience of the performers, and it was observable that no lady or gentleman entered or left the room without availing themselves of the opportunity to examine their personal appearance. Mr. Weaver introduced a few of the principal actors to Mr. Norwold, and left him in conversation with Mr. Ranton, after the call-boy had again summoned the actor-manager to his duty on the stage.

"I am glad to hear from my friend Elmsley, that we are to have the honour of producing your

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charming drama, sir," said Ranton. "I read it with great pleasure, and think I can make something of the gamester, should you have confidence in my poor ability to entrust me with the part."

Mr. Ranton had selected the best character in the piece, and which was not likely to fall to his lot, unless at the particular request of the young author. His commendatory speech was, therefore, not without an object, and Edward could only say he was happy to have the favourable opinion of Mr. Ranton.

That gentleman having been "called" away and Elmsley and Norwold left to themselves, the Captain took the opportunity to impress upon his friend the advisability of leaving the distribution of the characters to the manager, as he would thereby avoid giving offence to any sensitive lady or gentleman.

"I have known many long enmities arise from a fancied slight or an imaginary injustice in the distribution of the parts of a play," said the Captain. "Nor is it to be much wondered at when you consider that within the walls of the

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theatre is the actor's world, and it must be particularly mortifying to be displaying yourself every night to a disadvantage. Leave the *cast* to the manager, my young friend."

At that moment a lady entered who had (on the stage) been destroying the peace of mind of an amiable husband, and, in consequence, had been execrated by the feeling portion of the audience. She curtsied slightly to the two strangers, and then proceeded to arrange her head-dress, which the passion of the scene had somewhat disordered.

"You played that scene capitally to-night," said the gentleman who had been opposed dramatically to her a few moments before; "I declare I quite hated you."

"It is a very good bit," replied the lady; "the strongest situation in my part, which is a very up-hill affair."

"Oh, that is too bad," said her friend, "you have it all your own way to the end of the piece, whilst I have done really at the end of the first act. Nothing worth going on for afterwards."

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"What nonsense, my dear fellow," answered the lady. "You know you are not speaking the truth—that independently of the business of the last scene but one, you have—"

At this moment another lady entered, attired for the after-piece in the most enchanting fairy costume, which glittered as though powdered with diamond dust. Her beautiful face was improved by the taste with which her auburn hair was arranged, and her bright eyes seemed to sparkle with the consciousness of her beauty. O happy fairy!

"Ah, dear," said the malicious lady, breaking off the conversation she was engaged in; "how did you leave your poor husband?"

"Out of danger, thank God," replied the fairy; "a favourable change took place this morning, or I really could not have played to-night. What I suffered yesterday was dreadful! I wonder I got through at all. I would not have attempted it, but I could not lose my salary."

"Who sat up with Mr. —— ?" asked the other.

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"Oh, I did, of course; and I shall do so again to-night, as I have a horror of hired nurses," answered the fairy.

"And so have I, dear," said the malicious lady. "Now you know what sad experience I have had, and what a good nurse I am. You must let me go home with you to-night and take your place, or you will be ill also, and then—that castle-bell is my cue. I shall wait for you, mind that." And so saying, and having made the happy fairy happier by her sympathy, the malicious lady rushes on the stage, to be exposed before all her family connections and one of the best houses of the season, as a wicked monster who had nearly driven a husband to suicide and a wife into a lunatic asylum.

And such a double drama—one scene in the green-room and one scene on the stage—is played, with varying phases of joy and sorrow, crime and goodness, every night in a theatre.

As Elmsley and Norwold walked homewards their conversation turned naturally to the preceding events of the evening.

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"What do you think of your new experiences?" asked the Captain.

"New, indeed!" answered Edward. "I was inclined to consider the manager of a London theatre as an unapproachable despot, except by the favoured few. At least so run the traditions of the grand days of the old drama. Our friend, however, has been most kind and encouraging."

"Ah! Mr. Weaver is hardly an exception, I believe, now-a-days. He has made his own position, and many of our popular dramatists have had from him early recognition and assistance, although some of them are too proud to acknowledge it, I am afraid."

"The actors seem to be a charitable and kindly community," said Edward, "judging by what we have seen and heard this evening."

"They are in all matters except their professional opportunities," replied Elmsley. "Our friend Mr. Weaver has spent much, both of time and money, in his endeavour to make his brother actors provident and independent, and has suc-

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ceeded admirably. There are many actors, now, who are examples of economy and foresight. Fine qualities! fine qualities! But never much in my way. I owe to actors many hours of pleasant enjoyment, and have done my best to encourage them by using their orders largely. It gratifies them to do so; it gratifies them!"

Edward had frequently patronised the theatres of late by orders which the considerate Captain had supplied, and he was relieved from some feeling of obligation to the different managers by the knowledge just imparted by Elmsley. The Captain's order-hunting propensity was well known, but as he was an agreeable companion enough, and presentable at all times, and never suspected of being overburthened with money, he was generally supplied with free admissions by one or the other of his theatrical friends. That he made good use of them, occasionally, may be inferred from the little incident at the Cock in Fleet Street, which led to his intimacy with Vincent Elliott and a supper at the Lyre. The world was his oyster, and as

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he had evidently failed to open it with his sword proper, he now and then tried a stage dagger.

It was a lovely night, and the moon lighted up the old house near Primrose Hill, hiding with her splendour all traces of decay. There was a light in Edward's sitting-room, and two figures at the open window were watching the return of their two husbands.

As Elmsley waved his hat and sang, most inappropriately, "Behold how brightly breaks the morning," one lithe form left the window, and as soon as Edward reached the house the door was opened, and Florence clinging about his neck. Mrs. Elmsley had been married too long, and been too often a watcher, to display any enthusiasm at the return of her spouse, although she loved her Joe very much, and was proud of her Captain.

It was Florence's turn to entertain on this auspicious occasion, and she had arranged the neatest of suppers after the manner of Aunt Letty, who had often distinguished herself, even

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in Paris, by her elegant arrangement of such pleasant matters. The furniture of the room and table was scant enough, but the good taste of Florence made it appear abundant. Flowers which neither gems, nor gold and silver, and cunningest workmanship can ever equal, cropped up in many places, and looked prettier than anything else could have done, considering the humble fortunes of those who were there assembled together. The hearts of all were too mirthful to need other exhilaration than the events of the day had produced, yet Florence, with Mrs. Elmsley's assistance, had made a compound which Edward declared to be worthy of a bacchante, and the Captain of —— No—there were some recollections connected with the compotation which made him and Mrs. Elmsley laugh exceedingly.

Florence could not refrain asking again and again the particulars of the interview with the manager, and seemed disappointed rather that he had not been more prodigal of praise—that this passage and that had not been remembered and commended, until the loving critic had praised

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almost every line from "Act the First" to "the curtain falls." Whatever was to be the future of that drama, it had had its one night of success, and won its wreath of honour; and when Captain Elmsley led forth his dear Elizabeth, he felt that they had left in their first-floor a glory whose rays would penetrate into their own particular parlours.

The next morning was not so cloudless as the preceding night had been. As the broad glaring sun showed cracks and flaws in the old house, and weeds among the flower-beds and the garden-walks, so Edward's mistrust of his own powers showed him doubtful phrases and feeble fancies where Florence had seen only excelling beauties. Had he coveted only fame, he would have retreated from the pursuit, and buried his books like Prospero; but there was a stake to be won, in which the one dearest to his heart claimed a share, and he was bound to run the race, though failure and contempt should howl at him when he reached the goal.

The day was long, and the night longer, which

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intervened between the merry supper and the "reading" of the drama to the company of the Theatre Royal. The green-room presented a very different aspect to what it had done two nights before, when the Captain and Edward entered it at twelve o'clock in the day-time. Around it were seated the actors and actresses, summoned to take their parts in the "new piece." The daylight struggled into the room, through the ground-glass windows, their opacity increased by the dust and rains of many days. A little table, on which reposed the author's manuscript, supported by a bottle of water and its attendant tumbler, was placed at one end of the room. A silence that was almost unbroken by any one until Mr. Weaver arrived, and formally introduced the author to the company, gave Edward the notion that he was looked upon as a culprit, who was about to read a confession of his guilt preparatory to receiving condign punishment. Even Mr. Ranton kept aloof, and seated himself in an angle of the room where the shadows fell deepest. A gentleman whom he had often

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seen on the stage as the low comedian, complained briefly of toothache, and settled down in a remote corner; nor was there more animation exhibited when the manager, having retired, returned again in a few moments, bringing in the young *débutante* who was to supply the place of a former favourite, that had given herself airs and thrown up her engagement. The young actress was apparently as nervous as the young author, and Edward could not help regarding her with more interest than he would have done, perhaps, had he suspected how much her want of confidence was to affect himself.

The reading began, and Edward was annoyed with himself at the want of expression he was giving to his own written thoughts, simply because his auditors were strange to him; for Florence had restored his confidence in himself, and told him to continue brave for her sake. The silence, which continued as he read, did not aid him; the sentences he uttered appeared to have no influence; his pathos was disregarded; and his humour elicited no response except from the

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manager and the prompter, who also applauded at the end of the first act, and received very feeble support from Mr. Ranton and the low comedian.

Edward was rather mortified at this reception of his work, but it only gave him greater confidence in himself. He read the second act much more satisfactorily, but the result, however, was the same, and Edward concluded that he had produced an impression not at all favourable to that success which his friends had so unhesitatingly predicted.

The distribution of parts followed, and as each lady and gentleman received his or her allotted task, their manner was much the same. Each proceeded to ascertain the number of pages which had been set down for them, and then, with a glance or a shrug at some other performer, he or she left the room without any valediction. Except Mr. Ranton, who had been introduced to the author, had been consulted on the merits of the drama, and had stated his willingness to play the young gamester—the leading character—and had

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received the part of the gamester's friend, who was only second fiddle to the manager! The look of indignation which accompanied his curt "Good morning, sir," was worthy a more appreciating public than the prompter, the manager, and the offending author comprised at that moment.

The young *débutante,* who had remained in a distant part of the room, received her part, and kindly words of encouragement from the manager, with much meekness, and having curtseyed to Edward, took her departure quietly. Not so another lady, who had, in other days, trod the same boards as John Kemble and "the Siddons," but who now, from the combinations of faction and a succession of bad parts, had engaged to play anything, and of course never would without grumbling. She had been cast (as it is called in the language of the stage) a most interesting mother, of limited conversation, but whose maternal demonstrations were highly necessary to the development of the fable of the drama. With some remembrance, no doubt, of "the Siddons" floating in her mind, she advanced to

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the little table at which the prompter and author were still seated, and dashing down the offending leaves, exclaimed, "No thank you, gentlemen," and swept out of the room, a deeply injured woman; nor was Edward's distress at being the cause of so much suffering alleviated by the manager's emphatic rejoinder of "Won't you, Madam!"

When all were gone, Mr. Weaver came to Edward, and shaking him warmly by the hand, said: "I am more pleased with your piece now that I have listened to your own interpretation of it, than I was by my own reading."

"But the company appeared to condemn it by their silence," replied Edward.

"You must think nothing of that. It is a peculiarity of ours," said Mr. Weaver. "We are very selfish, very greedy about our parts—I am as bad as the rest, but having the right of selection, I am better tempered than I used to be. There must be bad and good positions in dramas, as there are in the world outside the theatre, but nobody likes to have the worst if he can help it.

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You will find them all loyal workers when we meet at rehearsal—even the contemporary of Siddons, who has had much to embitter her life both in and out of my dominions. At one o'clock on Monday we will compare parts, and on Saturday week we will invite the opinion of the public. Good day."

With what strange feelings Edward went forth into the broad daylight! The excitement of the past hour or two had been very great. Another step had been taken towards the dark, the important future. He was glad to have the Captain's arm to lean upon, and the Captain's chatter to excuse his own silence.

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CHAPTER V.

MRS. JELLIFER SUPS WITH AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE, AND PAYS THE BILL WILLINGLY.

MRS. JELLIFER, as we have said, loved money as dearly as her husband loved it. She had learned its value very early in life, and had sold her small inheritance of virtue, in her youth, for money. Although her skin was very fair at that time, and no stain of Africa could be traced in her bright blue eyes, she had been sold as she had been bought when her master had grown tired of her companionship, and Jasper Jellifer had purchased her with his respectable name and position, she giving in exchange neither love, nor even regard, only money. They had lived quietly together, their only bond of sympathy being the love of gain, for Mrs. Jellifer had determined never again to be at the mercy of the world for a dinner. This resolve seemed like prudence and independ-

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ence, but as she and her husband prospered, her love of gain increased, and she always rejoiced when Jasper had added to his heap, and asked no questions. Her brother, Raymond Ray, had had his changes of fortune, and though Mrs. Jasper could not, as the respectable woman she had become, approve openly of the desperate courses he pursued, she condoned them in her own mind, and always maintained towards Raymond the same sisterly bearing as she had done in the days of their comparative innocency. They had proved to each other the only unselfish, sympathising beings in the great world; and so, whatever of love—the seed of Paradise—remained in their hearts, although it grew with a rank growth, it was intertwined, and so remained, through every storm of fortune. The discovery, therefore, which she had made of Jasper's desertion, and of some other wrong, she knew not what, to Raymond, had begotten a feeling of dislike, although she believed that they—she and Jasper—had profited by the injury. A scheme of retaliation had already dawned upon her active mind, and it would only

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need slight further aggravation to induce her to put it into execution. This stimulus was supplied, very unexpectedly, by a conversation between two men in the railway carriage, which Mrs. Jellifer overheard, when on her way to Morden.

The conversation was carried on in a peculiar slang, which proved to Mrs. Jellifer at once that they were either thieves or thief-takers, and as she was moderately acquainted with the terms employed, we will avoid, in transferring to our pages what occurred, idioms which would render a glossary necessary to the uninitiated.

"Have you been in these parts before, Jubilee?" asked the elder of the two men to whom we have referred.

"No—not that I remember," was the reply; "though I suppose you have, or they would not have dug you out of your retirement to help in this job."

"O, yes!" answered the first speaker. "I once knew every yard of ground we are likely to go over. I have not been lower down, though, than our station for some years—ay, a matter of

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two-or-three-and-twenty, I dare say, since I was at Morden."

"Indeed," remarked Mr. Jubilee.

"A pretty put-up case I had then," said Mr. Higgler (it was our old friend). "A very pretty case, and I worked it, I am proud to say, to a perfect success. The parties concerned had gone into partnership, I fancy, as receivers, but one of them took fright, and so, from information which I received, I came down here with little Cobby, who used to play on a box of wires which he called a dulcimer. I started in the higgling line, in case any one should have known my name, you see; and so, after about five weeks on and off, I bagged my bird, with all the evidence in his possession. I wondered at the time what the other party had to gain by 'nosing' upon his friend, but after the principal was convicted, something turned up which made me suppose that the other party was afraid of being put in the hole some day or other."

"Was the other in good feather then?" asked Jubilee.

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"Yes; he was a miller, and had got into good credit, though he had been on our books for some time. He was called *The Silver Eel,* because he had slipped through our fingers so often. Old Sir Richard Birnie gave him the name, but I hooked him at last. He was 'lagged' for one-and-twenty years, which was a good thing for other parties, I fancy, besides a tender relation!"

Mrs. Jellifer listened to this communication until her blood became cold in her veins, and she almost a statue. The noise of the carriage had made parts of it indistinct and disconnected, but she had gathered enough to suspect that Jasper—her husband Jasper—had betrayed to the avenging law her only brother, Raymond, and been the means of transporting him, subjecting him to all the after-misery he had suffered, and to the cruel death which had overtaken him.

Yes. That was the conduct of her husband, if she had guessed rightly; and if it were so,—She would not rest satisfied with this imperfect hearing, but when those two men left the carriage

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she would get out also, and question the one who had told the story, as to its truth, and obtain an answer if she paid gold for every word.

As men of Mr. Higgler's profession are rarely surprised at any adventure which comes in their way, the old Bow Street runner received a lady who wanted to speak to him at the Station Inn with calmness and courtesy. The more so as the lady proposed, before proceeding to business, to order some refreshment, and a bottle of sherry for herself and the two officers, and which the latter regarded as a promising indication of liberal treatment in other respects, should their services be required. The luncheon over, and the wine drunk, Mrs. Jellifer requested Mr. Higgler to favour her with a private audience. Mr. Jubilee was too much a man of business to be offended at this preference, and therefore rose to leave the room, simply intimating that he should take a stroll to look at the church, and be back again in half an hour.

"My object in asking this interview," said the lady, "arises from something I overheard

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you say in the train as we came down from London."

Mr. Higgler felt a little ashamed of himself at this avowal, as he considered he had been unprofessionally communicative, and might have compromised himself.

"I heard you mention a name which, I fancy, refers to a person I once knew—The Silver Eel. Was his real name Raymond Ray?"

Mr. Higgler, having recovered his composure, was not to be caught napping, and therefore replied by another question.

"Why do you ask, ma'am?"

"Mr. Higgler," continued the lady, "I am not unacquainted with the proverbial caution of gentlemen of your profession, nor am I ignorant that you are accustomed to consider your information valuable. There is a five-pound note at your service, and now I will proceed to explain myself. The Silver Eel, or Raymond Ray, was very much attached to me, and I to him. His fate is known to me up to the time of his depar-

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ture from England. I wish to know if he is living or dead."

"That's a question I can't answer off-hand, ma'am," replied Higgler, "for after we have worked a case to conviction, we think no more about the party, unless he comes across us again in the way of business, when the sentence is out, and Ray hasn't done that at present."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady. "You brought his guilt home to him very cleverly and clearly," said the lady; "but I suppose your information was good from the first."

"Information goes for little in such cases, ma'am," said Mr. Higgler. "It's getting the evidence complete—completing the chain, ma'am, link by link, ma'am."

"And making one now and then," said the lady, with a faint smile. "Mr. Jellyby or Jellyfy always said that you placed the stolen plate in the mill, as the connecting link between it and Ray was wanting."

"Jellifer said that?" cried Higgler. "Why, the lying scoundrel knew——. I tell you

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what, ma'am, if I heard that said by Mr. Jellifer——. I beg, ma'am, you won't say that again to me or anybody; I don't like such mean actions attributed to me."

Mr. Higgler was evidently disturbed by Mrs. Jellifer's clever insinuation, and she had gathered enough from it to be certain that Jasper had been concerned in her brother's condemnation. Yet she must be certain, quite certain, before she proceeded to take action. She apologised, therefore, to Mr. Higgler, and begged him to forget what she had said, and as there was no train from the station until the morning, she hoped he would allow her to provide a supper as an atonement for her thoughtlessness. She had been an old campaigner, and should be sorry to give offence to one so celebrated as Mr. Higgler.

"Such a lady-like apology, and such a liberal offer," Mr. Higgler said, "quite made amends for any annoyance, and if he might suggest a couple of ducks with sage and onions, he was sure Mr. Jubilee would be pleased, and he, himself, delighted."

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And so it was arranged, and at the proper time the savoury dainties shed their perfume throughout the Station Inn, and were then offered up a smoking sacrifice on the altar of Friendship. Strong meats and strong drinks usually go together, and Mr. Higgler and Mr. Jubilee were prodigal rather of brandy and water.

"Well, gentlemen," at length said the lady, "I must now bid you good night, and once more I thank you, Mr. Higgler, for so kindly accepting my peace-offering."

"Not another word, madam," said Higgler—"not another, I beg: but if that Jellifer ever says in your hearing that I laid a plant for The Silver Eel, you tell him from me, that a quiet tongue keeps many a wrist out of the darbies. But he was always a sneak, ma'am, and so I used him."

"I never doubted it," said the lady. "I always knew that it was he who 'nosed' upon Raymond."

The familiar word threw Higgler off his guard, and he exclaimed:—

"He did nose on him, ma'am, and made a pretty penny by the job."

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"Good night, gentlemen," said Mrs. Jellifer, with a pleasant smile, "and if I do not see you in the morning, good-bye!"

She left the room, and though the light of her candle fell full upon her face, every feature grew darker and darker as she walked up-stairs to her bed-chamber, and scarcely brightened when she had fallen into an uneasy slumber.

The next morning Mrs. Jellifer rose early, and paying her large bill without a sigh or a murmur, proceeded by the first train to Morden, some time before her guests of the preceding night had awakened from their sleep.

Mrs. Jellifer soon transacted her business in Morden, staying a shorter time than usual in her old house in the Market-place, and declining the proffered hospitality of her tenant, with whom she was in better esteem than Jasper. The thoughts then uppermost in her mind led her by the old church, and away down by the side of the mill-stream, and under the drooping trees, until she came in sight of the miller's garden. She saw that it was neatly kept; on the lawn

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several young children were at play, linked hand in hand, and singing in concert a simple nursery song, which seemed to Mrs. Jellifer like a hymn, and as she remembered who had lived there formerly, and what had been his life and death, she thought that some good spirit had driven out all the evil things which once abided there, and had peopled it with angels.

She turned away sorrowfully, and walked to the station, on her return to London. Before she had arrived there she had forgotten the glimpse she had had of Paradise, and had yielded to her evil thoughts, which had now but one direction, the accomplishment of a retribution from which nothing was to turn her aside, until she had pursued it remorselessly to the end. When she reached her London home, she met Jasper with a warmth of greeting which had been somewhat unusual with her of late, and he, a Samson in cunning, was beguiled, and in a fair way to be betrayed by his Delilah.

It was somewhat strange that two persons on the same day should have passed up and down

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the iron road between London and Morden, intent upon doing justice to lucky Jasper Jellifer; but so it was, as Jack Spraggatt had gone down to solve the mystery which had been so long in his keeping.

Jack had taken Vincent Elliott into a limited confidence, (for he had carefully preserved Warner's secret), and after consultation it had been decided that, whilst Elliott followed up the slight clue which had been obtained to Edward Norwold's retreat, Jack should proceed to Morden at once, and disinter the unholy thing buried among the peaceful graves in the churchyard. It was decided that when Jack had discovered the resting-place of Godfrey Mason, he should wait until night, and then recover the long-buried box and its mysterious contents. Fortunately, this would be easy of accomplishment, as the old servant Stevens occupied one of the almshouses abutting on the churchyard, and with her Jack could remain without exciting observation, and obtain ready access to the object of which he was in search.

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It was evening when Jack arrived at Morden, and avoiding observation as much as possible, he proceeded at once to the churchyard, not doubting for a moment, but the discovery of the tombstone indicated in Ray's paper would be easy enough. He began his scrutiny, therefore, carelessly at first, but after having continued it for some time without success, he became alarmed, lest some trick had been played upon his credulity by Ray, and that no such memorials existed. Again he searched carefully, and read all the inscriptions which were legible, but without finding the name of Godfrey Mason, and it then occurred to him, that he had better make himself known to Mrs. Stevens, his old nurse, and learn from her if she had any knowledge which could assist him.

Great was the joy of the old servant, when she held the hand of the dear young master once more between her own, and saw through her honest tears the face she had looked upon so often in years gone by. Every baby-trace had gone, but there were the mother's eyes, and

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the father's manly features, which she remembered so well, and it was some time before she was sufficiently calm to listen, so as to understand Jack's inquiries.

What a strange interest for him to take in the grave of a stranger, when those of his own kindred were so near at hand, and which she had tended with such care for so many years, out of the pure old love she had borne them, when sharing their daily bread.

Master Godfrey Mason? Surely his was one of the gravestones that was broken down five years ago, when the parson's donkey strayed into the churchyard, and made more havoc there, than Time had done in half a century. Yes, she remembered now, it stood the fourth from the footpath, and the first from the church wall, as his grand-daughter, who was living then as her next neighbour, had grieved so at the disaster. There was a portion of the headstone left, which she could show him.

This was fortunate indeed, and Jack rejoiced within himself that he had come on his former

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visit to his parents' graves, and had waited to reward the humble friend, who had planted flowers about them, when she thought none would regard her, but, perhaps, the angels in heaven. He bade her keep his present visit a secret, and despatched her into the village to buy materials for supper, whilst he assured himself, that her recollection of the position of the gravestone was correct. There was a fragment at the spot she had indicated, and a few inches from it a footstone adjoining. With what interest did he regard that little patch of earth, believing that it covered some long-hidden secret, whose revelation was to effect a powerful influence on the lives of those who were now unconscious of the existence of its silent testimony. The setting sun, which made the west a bank of fire, deepened the shadow of the church upon the south side mounds, as though there was sorrow associated with that which was about to be revealed; but then overhead was the moon, now like a round of film, soon to be paramount in the heavens

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and over the earth, and by her light his work was to be done.

The intervening time would have moved wearily enough, had not Mrs. Stevens's memory been singularly preserved, and from its stores brought forth wondrous stories of Jack's marvellous childhood, wherein he performed such deeds, and uttered such clever sayings, that he would have been a prodigy, had not every child of Adam, since Abel stood at his mother's knee, been equally surprising.

Although Mrs. Stevens had satisfied the curiosity of her immediate neighbours, and accounted for Jack's presence by describing him as the son of an old friend who had called to see her, he insisted upon having her solitary candle extinguished at her usual bed-time, and continued their conversation by moonlight until the church clock struck eleven, when he sallied forth, carrying in his hand a table-knife and an old trowel. As he approached the place of concealment, the reverberation of the bell was still humming in the church tower; and no sooner had he knelt down

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to commence removing the turf and soil, than a loud laugh startled him by its distinctness. A moment's reflection enabled him to discover the cause. It came from the departing guests of the public-house, which stood near the entrance to the churchyard, and as he heard footsteps and voices approach along the pathway, he withdrew into the shadow of a buttress of the church, and commended his own prudence which had extinguished Mrs. Stevens's candle. He waited a few minutes before he resumed his task, and then found but little difficulty, even with his imperfect tools, in clearing away the earth and grass, which he trusted had remained undisturbed since Ray had placed them there. In about a quarter of an hour, he came to some hard substance, which he judged rightly was the long-buried box, and which, with a little more exertion, he brought forth into the moonlight. It had been covered with some kind of wrapper, which was now almost decayed, and crumbled in parts under his touch. Hastily filling in the hole again, he returned with the treasure to Mrs. Stevens's

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house before he attempted any further examination of it. He was so fearful of being watched—he hardly knew wherefore—that he would only examine it then by the light of the moon, and he could therefore discern nothing more than that the box was of some hard heavy wood, securely fastened by screws. With this knowledge he proposed to be content until the morning; and having, with some difficulty, persuaded Mrs. Stevens to retire to her own bed, he tried to compose himself to sleep in an arm-chair. The earthy smell of the box, the wonder which possessed him as to its contents, the half-hourly booming of the church clock, made sleep impossible for some time; and when he fell into an uneasy dose, his previous thoughts and occupation mingled in his dreams. With the first dawn of light he was astir, and then he renewed his examination. The wrapper had been a piece of tarpaulin, and was decayed, except where the folds had been doubled. This he carefully removed, and found, as he had conjectured overnight, the box was of oak, nearly an inch in

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thickness, and about a foot square, fastened together with large screws, now rusted into the wood, and promising not to be withdrawn without great difficulty. He was, therefore, compelled to wait until Mrs. Stevens was up, and able to procure him the necessary instrument to attempt their removal. The earthy smell had become so powerful that it nearly sickened him, owing to his want of sleep, and the anxiety of the past night; and drawing aside the curtain, he opened the window, which looked upon the churchyard. His thoughts then carried him back to the time when his parents were among the living, and he a happy boy, never dreaming that a time would come when he should look upon two green mounds, and call them Father! Mother! or that he should be so near them, needing their friendly counsel, and be conscious that they could not hear him. And then he looked back upon the years which had intervened since the last green graves had been made, and the many, almost countless, miles which he had travelled away from them, to

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make a home in a distant wilderness, never believing that he should return to lay his bones beside them. Then he remembered the miserable convict whom he had known the pleasant thriving townsman, and who had come to him in his wretchedness, to lay down and die, and to bequeath to him a mystery, which he had dug stealthily out of the earth, as though he were sharing in some crime committed long ago, and buried for more than twenty years. There it was lying behind him on the table, smelling horribly of the graves among which it had been hidden so long, its secret unrevealed, and for the present defying his efforts to disclose it. All these fancies proceeded, doubtless, from his feverish pulse and heated brain; but he could bear his solitude no longer, and called to Mrs. Stevens to come down to him. She was already dressed, and her presence soon dispelled the unpleasant feeling which had possessed him; and as she bustled about to put her house in order, and to prepare breakfast, he too began to talk of old times, and joke her about certain love-passages, which made the old lady smile,

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though the jests brought tears into her eyes. They never knew true love who say that it can die. The flowers which composed its garland may fade or wither, or be exchanged for an *immortelle*, but it lives with us to the last, be we wise or simple.

When breakfast was ready, so fragrant was the bacon, and so golden the yolks beside it, that Jack forgot his sentimentalism, and ate like the sturdy yeoman of thirty years before. When the meal was over, Mrs. Stevens was sent in search of that unromantic instrument, a screw-driver, and after nearly an hour's absence, returned with the most diminutive example. Jack thought there was a spell about the box, and that he was never to open it, for feeble as the screw-driver was, the rusted screw-heads broke under its pressure, and the stout oak lid remained as firmly fixed on as ever.

What was to be done? To call in the auxiliary aid of any one in Morden, would be to proclaim that Jack Spraggatt had returned, and found a box containing a secret that would be none by

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twelve o'clock at midnight, if Morden ale was the provocative to small-talk,—which it had been hitherto within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

No, there was nothing to be done, but to confide the rotten wrapper to the safe keeping of Mrs. Stevens, pack up the box in an old newspaper, and carry it forthwith to London, despite his curiosity, which, now that it was broad daylight, began to be painfully tantalising.

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CHAPTER VI.

FLORENCE DISPLAYS A NEW TALENT.

THE rehearsals at the theatre progressed, and not much to the satisfaction or comfort of the young author. When he came to have his scenes dissected, as it were, and their continuity destroyed by the actors, who were necessarily imperfect, he grew mistrustful of his own conceptions, which appeared to have lost all point and force when thus presented before him. The frequent interruptions occasioned by changes of position, arrangements of the business of the stage, and trivial alterations of dialogue, made it almost impossible for himself to follow the succession of incidents, and their consequent connection with the passion and humour of the scene, so that he could not imagine how out of this apparent chaos would ever come "the perfect chrysolite," which his partial critics had declared to be waiting the

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acceptance of the British public. The nervousness of the young *débutante* increased, and although she had been well tutored in the art of acting, she was evidently deficient in natural feeling and that quick perception, which alone ensure distinction in the arduous profession she had chosen. Notwithstanding the manager's assurance, that "she would be all right at night," and that "few actors could or would rehearse with any earnestness," Edward could see nothing of the impassioned Gipsy girl his fancy had imagined, and upon whom much of the general success depended. He was accustomed, therefore, to return home dispirited by the morning's work, and it required all the cheerful hopefulness of Florence, and the assurance of the experienced Elmsley, to dispel his inquietude. In this they were only partially successful, as his distressing fears came back to him more strongly during the night, and he rose feverish and depressed. It was only the remembrance of how great would be the prize, if he were successful,—that the venture might bring independence, and open a happy future for his

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beloved Florence,—that stifled the anxieties which possessed him, and made him brave enough to dare the worst that actor or critic might be able to inflict. There wanted but five days to the eventful night which was to decide the fate of his drama, and he had passed a morning of great anxiety, owing to a preposterous request of Mr. Ranton, who had asked that he should be allowed to commit suicide on the roof of a house, roll down the tiles, and fall at the feet of his betrayer, feeling, as he did, that without some such striking situation, the piece would flag, and the result be more than questionable. Had Edward known that Mr. Ranton was thinking only of Mr. Ranton, and not of the ultimate success of Mr. Norwold, he would have made light of the doubt which had been created in his mind by the communication, and not permitted it to have sat so heavily on his heart, as he paced home through the rain, and arrived at Primrose Hill drenched completely. Elmsley laughed heartily when he learned the cause of Edward's excessive anxiety, and Florence scolded him with the

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prettiest words, and the most gentle voice, for not deferring to her opinion in preference to that of the interested actor. Edward pleaded for pardon, and obtained it, but the rain and the anxiety combined had produced their effect, and the poor author went shivering to his bed, to become in a few hours so feverish and restless, that Florence arose, and roused the Elmsleys, who soon agreed with her that medical aid was required. Their fears were justified by the opinion of the doctor, who pronounced the patient to be seriously ill, but in no positive danger, if quiet could be insured.

There would be the difficulty. Florence knew that his thoughts would be away always with the actors and their requirements, and such proved to be the case.

During the delirium consequent upon the fever, he was repeating sentences of his little play, and correcting the faulty readings of the performers, and entreating for more passion or more mirthfulness in the delivery of his words. Then he would speak of failure, yet uttered no regret, on

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account of his own wounded vanity or loss of literary reputation, but connected all his regrets with the future of his wife, of his Florence, now so utterly dependent upon him. When he became calm enough to speak rationally, almost his first inquiry was as to the progress of his drama; and Elmsley did not hesitate to give a most glowing account of what had been achieved during the last three days. Florence saw he mistrusted the Captain, and when the doctor came she told him what had occurred; and finding that such anxiety might renew the danger which Edward had just escaped, she obtained permission from her husband to accompany Captain Elmsley to the theatre, and observe for herself.

The courtesy and kindness of Mr. Weaver, and indeed of all at the theatre, soon removed any embarrassment which she had felt at her strange position; and as the actors were now perfect in their parts, she was gratified by what she saw and heard. A slight difficulty of situation had been discovered in the last act, and its alteration had been postponed until the author should again

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attend the rehearsal, but as that was not possible now, the manager suggested a device of his own. Florence, who had a complete knowledge of her husband's conception of the argument of his play, saw a discrepancy of idea in this suggestion, and with a modest rejection, and a readiness of device which surprised her kind adviser, she immediately removed the difficulty by supplying a more appropriate alteration.

"You must make the next ascent of our dramatic Parnassus," said Mr. Weaver, smiling; "for it is quite evident you have a natural genius for our business."

"Oh, dear no," replied Florence. "I derive my present inspiration from Primrose Hill. Besides, I have read, and heard this drama read, until I could repeat every line of it, and thus readily saw the way to overcome your difficulty."

For the manager's satisfaction the last act was rehearsed again, and when it was over he warmly congratulated Florence on the improvement she had made, and bidding her be of good cheer, promised her that success was almost certain.

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Florence returned home, nearly satisfied with what she had witnessed; but Edward was right, she feared, as to the gipsey exponent. The young girl had been trained to act, and no doubt had been applauded by kindly friends; but now that she came to contrast her ability with the powers of more experienced performers, she appeared to feel her own deficiencies, and to lose confidence in herself.

The considerate Mr. Weaver, however, encouraged her in every way, and his experience in management had more than once shown him that the unpromising actor at rehearsal had frequently been the most successful when excited by the presence of an audience. On the day before the production of the piece, however, he had not been so satisfied as he had expected to have been; so after the business on the stage had ended, he called the poor girl into his room, and kindly spoke to her as to certain defects which he had advised her previously to correct, and then dismissed her with many words of encouragement. He thought, however, that she began to weep as she left his

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room, and fearing that such a display of feeling was an unfavourable indication of her success, he resolved to be prepared for failure. When he rejoined Florence and the Captain, who had waited his return on the stage, he frankly communicated his doubts, but added his conviction that the deficiency of the actors would not affect the reception of the piece.

This opinion was very alarming to Florence, who could not share in the manager's consolatory conclusion, and as she walked homeward she discussed with the Captain the propriety of communicating what they had heard to her husband. Elmsley was disposed to do so, but Florence dreaded the effect which might be produced, in his present state, by any unfavourable intelligence; and she therefore proposed to call upon the doctor and be guided by his advice. It was well that she had taken this precaution.

"My dear madam," said the doctor, "it would not be possible to declare the consequences of such a communication at this moment. It is quite clear that his whole thoughts are set upon

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this event: his mind has been so occupied with it —so strained by constant meditation upon it, and for the important reasons which he discovered during his delirium—that any delay in removing the exciting cause might prove very, very serious to him."

"Oh, sir!" cried Florence, clasping her hands together, "is there so much to fear? Is there danger to his dear life in success or failure? Is this matter, for which we were so desirous, and at which we so rejoiced, likely to bring such terrible results? Oh, sir!"

"Pray calm yourself, my dear young lady," said the doctor, taking her hand. "There is no cause, trust me, for fear, if we act wisely and composedly."

"I will—I will be composed," and Florence sat down, her hand still retained by the doctor.

"There is nothing to be apprehended—that is, no great danger—from the failure of his play, and I believe such a result is not anticipated. Even if the reception of it is not all that we could wish, it will be quite possible to keep such a fact to

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ourselves. But I do believe that any delay in its production, any justifiable anticipation of failure, would produce more anxiety than would be beneficial, and therefore I advise your silence upon Mr. Weaver's doubts, or the young actress's deficiencies. Pray be hopeful, as I am, I assure you, of Mr. Norwold's speedy recovery, and I will make it possible for me to stay with him to-morrow evening during your absence at the theatre, and I trust you will return with such good news, that you may soon throw 'my physic to the dogs.' You see I can quote Shakspere as well as Celsus."

Florence resolutely accepted what comfort she could from the doctor's words, and returned, —oh, how anxiously—to the sick couch of her husband.

Mrs. Elmsley, who had divided the duties of nurse with Florence, now reported that Edward had had some calm sleep, and was decidedly better than he was in the morning. He had twice inquired the time, as though he were watching the return of his wife, and a slight

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flush passed over his face when she had entered the room.

Florence affected a cheerfulness which appeared to gratify the sick man, and he listened with apparent pleasure at her account of the morning's rehearsal; but when Mrs. Elmsley had withdrawn, a sadness stole over his face, and he held out his poor white hand to be taken by Florence.

"I have been thinking since you have been away, dearest," he said, with some difficulty, "what would have been your lot, if death had come to me in this fever. I should have left you the most friendless woman in this great London."

"But that danger is past, dearest," replied Florence, "and you have now only to encourage pleasant thoughts and cheerful hopes, and we shall be happier for the few anxious days we have known; shall we not?"

She kissed his forehead, and was pleased to find it cool and damp.

"I trust we shall. Another night, another day,

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and another long evening, and our future will be known to us," he said.

"Only in part, dear! Only in a very little part," replied Florence. "If we win the prize we have reckoned upon, so much the happier we. If we draw a blank—and there are so many blanks in all the lotteries of life—why then—"

"I shall despair," interrupted Edward.

"And I shall not," said Florence; "nor shall you, dear boy, if I can help it. You must not forget that there are those who love me, and it is only for a time that they are estranged from us; and—"

"Help must not come from them at present," replied Edward. "No; I must meet them as an independent man, not as an object for their bounty. With you it should be different—you are their child."

"And your wife—your foolish, but loving wife, who cannot talk wisely to you for having such fancies; but who loves you with all her woman's soul, and forgives you for hinting that she could have any fortunes apart from yours."

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Edward lay silent for some minutes, and then said:

"It is strange, very strange, that my life should have been so unlike others born to my position and prospects. My childhood was unhappy very often, and from unusual causes; my youth was saddened by the consciousness of my father's wrong to me; and what my present manhood would have been had you not loved me, I know not. I have wondered, lying here, why my life has been so unhappy. Why has it been so, Florence?"

"Why should it not have been so?" replied his wife. "Sorrows are our teachers, and make us know that we are mortal, and surrounded by mortality. Without them, we should fancy earth was heaven, and live only for life and death, and not for eternity. We must

> 'Love our sorrows, for they bring
> Their own excuse in after years:
> The Rainbow—see how fair a thing
> God built up of tears.'"

This simple verse seemed to dwell in the ear of

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the sick man as he tried to repeat it, and when he had accomplished it, by the aid of Florence's prompting, he fell into a quiet sleep.

It was hardly to be expected that Elmsley would give up his old haunts and pursuits on account of his sick friend and lodger, and less so as he was now of some importance among his dramatic associates, being in possession, "behind the curtain," of the secret of authorship of the new piece, always a subject of interest to the theatrical world, or "the profession," as actors delight to call themselves. He had, therefore, been about town much as usual, and in the course of his perambulations had again met with Elliott at the old hostelry in Fleet Street. Vincent was not over anxious to renew his intimacy with Elmsley, as Warner, for some reason or the other, did not appear to entertain the highest opinion of the Captain, and it was therefore with some reluctance that he accepted his invitation to share the same table in the common dining-room; but having been so recently under some obligation to him, he sat down. The Captain was, of course, full of

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his great subject, but carefully concealed the name of the author, unfortunately, or Vincent Elliott, and the others interested in the discovery of Florence and her husband, would have been spared many hours of anxious search and painful inquietude. Elmsley, like a kind friend, had been busy everywhere endeavouring to secure the attendance of all upon whose good offices he could rely in favour of the author, and Elliott was glad to secure his retreat unaccompanied by the Captain, by giving a hasty promise to take a private box for the eventful evening, a promise which he redeemed early the next day.

Vincent Elliott was now an admitted visitor of Mrs. Gregson and Mr. Warner, but not an accepted suitor of Marian Mayley; as Mr. Warner had exacted a promise, after ascertaining, by the aid of his City agent, the true position of Vincent, that the wooing of the young lady was not to be considered conceded by their intimacy at present. Vincent had, however, made himself acceptable to Mrs. Gregson and Cousin Martha, and may have been considered, therefore,

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to have advanced considerably towards the main object of his ambition.

"What I like in Mr. Elliott," said Mrs. Gregson, "is his modesty and want of assumption. Why, though he is an Old Bailey barrister, who, they say, has the impudence of the old gentleman, he never interrupts me when I am talking, and thinks no more of his horsehair wig, which he never seems to wear, than if he had been born as bald as a coot! He sits as silent as a beadle in church, and generally has the good sense to agree with my opinions. What do you say, Marian?"

That young lady declared that she had never taken any particular notice of Mr. Elliott's manner, but she thought, after his conduct in connection with Floretta, he could hardly be called unusually modest or unassuming. But Cousin Martha asserted, that she had come into the drawing-room one morning, and at a time when Marian was supposed to be engaged in her library, and found their niece watching from her window with great interest the approach of some person,

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who turned out to be Mr. Vincent Elliott, and that she saw Marian run to the looking-glass and carefully arrange her ringlets, before she was aware that Cousin Martha was looking at her.

Marian declared that Martha's story was nonsense.

Mrs. Gregson added also:

"Now I come to remember, he has always contrived to edge himself in next to Marian at the play; and somehow or the other there has always been room for him to do so, though I had complained before of being scrowdged, over and over again."

Marian was perfectly shocked at her aunt's insinuation, and was in the midst of an avowal that she never would go anywhere again with Mr. Elliott, when that young gentleman was announced, and presented himself on no other business than to beg Mrs. Gregson's acceptance of a box for the new piece on the following night.

"Well, now, that is kind of you, Mr. Elliott," said Mrs. Gregson, "and was the thing I was about to propose sending for; but money saved

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is money gained, and I thank you, sir. Keep down, Floretta, and don't dirty the gentleman's trouseys. It is astonishing how fond that dog seems to be of you, Mr. Elliott, though you did kidnap him. Well! of course, my dear Marian, I know we promised to forgive and forget."

Vincent blushed sadly for a barrister, and poor Marian was rosy as an autumn sunset.

Cousin Martha was evidently chagrined, as she had accepted an engagement to tea in the City, and could not be of the play party. She therefore suggested, a little spitefully, perhaps, that it was a pity her seat should be lost, and that it would be a good opportunity to ask Mr. and Mrs. Warner to take an evening's diversion.

"Poor things, to be sure," said Mrs. Gregson, not regarding the clouds upon the faces of Elliott and Marian—"they are as melancholy in their fine house as two canaries moulting in a cage. I am sure a little artificial misery will do them good and make them cheerful, and the pieces at the what's-a-name theatre are always very touch-

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ing. I never go without salts, and a good supply of handkerchiefs, for I do enjoy a hearty cry when there's nothing really to cry about."

Marian affected to approve highly of this suggestion, and as Mr. and Mrs. Gregson would fill the box, she would remain at home, or, better still, go with Cousin Martha to the tea party in the City.

Vincent wished secretly Cousin Martha had been at the Mansion House, or any other distant locality, for her considerateness; for although he would have done much to have lightened the sorrow which oppressed Warner and his wife, he would have preferred some other mode of procedure, especially as he had expended two guineas to secure, as he thought, as many hours with a certain young lady, who was not his betrothed—at present.

Of course, such an arrangement as Marian proposed could not be permitted, nor was it necessary, as Vincent had arranged to go with a friend—a terrible fib! Cupid, like many other little boys, is a sad story-teller, and if Jove really

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laughed at all "lovers' perjuries," what a merry time he must have had of it when Juno was not at home!

Although Marian did not believe Vincent in the least, she was too good-natured to interpose further difficulty to her aunt's arrangements, and therefore it was settled that the Warners were to be invited.

Mrs. Gregson immediately set out for the Warners, and pleaded for nearly an hour before she could obtain their assent to be of her party, but her pertinacity was rewarded at last, Warner and his wife Lucy consenting to be present at a stranger drama than is oftentimes played even in the unreal world of a theatre.

Captain Elmsley had returned home somewhat earlier than was his custom, and Florence, from her window, seeing him enter the garden, stole softly from her room to meet him.

"I have been so anxiously expecting you, Captain Elmsley," she said; "I have received a note which has almost distracted me. Please read it."

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The note was from Mr. Weaver, and was as follows:—

"My Dear Madam,

"I have just received a communication from the father of Miss * * (the new actress), and he informs me that his daughter, alarmed at some observations of mine—most kindly meant and communicated—has become so utterly alarmed at her responsibility, that she has left London with her mother, and therefore will not appear to-morrow night. What can be done shall be done, but I am certain that no one could get the part into her head, much less act it, by to-morrow night. For my own loss and disappointment I care comparatively little, but, after our conversation of this morning, I fear it may add to Mr. Norwold's indisposition."

"Yes," interrupted Florence. "Yes, that is the dreadful part of it! You heard what the doctor said! The disappointment may kill my husband. What is to be done?"

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Captain Elmsley's head was not quite so clear as it ought to have been when he reached home, but this astounding news dispelled the effects of his previous conviviality. He had come from a knot of good fellows, who had been toasting to the success of his friend, and he had been eloquent on the anticipated triumph, and now the trophy of cards was blown down by the breath of Miss ——, the novice! After walking up and down the unkempt garden, bareheaded, for some time, he returned into the house, and Florence instantly went to him, looking at him with large wondering eyes, as though she would read the conclusion at which he had arrived before he could utter it.

"Elizabeth, my dear," said the Captain, addressing his wife, "go to Mr. Norwold's room, in case he should need anything; I want to speak a few minutes with Mrs. Norwold."

Elizabeth had been so long accustomed to do her husband's bidding unquestioned, that she went away at once, although her woman's curio-

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sity to learn the end of this dilemma was consuming her.

"Madam," said Elmsley, closing the door which his wife had intentionally left open—"Madam, you are a brave, loving woman, I am sure—are you not? and would do much to save your husband—would you not?"

"Anything—die, if need be."

"There is one chance of overcoming this difficulty, and the only one which presents itself to me. If delay in the production were of no consequence, the matter would be easy enough. But it is of consequence, though only for a day or two, and no actress would risk her reputation to play the part in that time. Mr. Norwold might imagine that his own mistrust of success was shared by the manager, and we might not be able to make him believe the truth, annoying as that is."

"He would not believe us, I fear!" cried Florence, wringing her hands.

"There is but one person who could prevent such a catastrophe, but I am afraid she would

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hesitate to undertake the task," said Elmsley, slowly.

"No—she must not!" cried Florence. "I will go to her at once! She shall be paid! All that we are to gain she shall have."

"Would she do it, then?" said Elmsley, all that the world had left him of a gentleman filling his voice and manner. "I fear that she might say 'I am too inexperienced—I have never been subjected to the gaze of a crowded theatre, to speak the words of simulated sorrow or pleasure, and I might fail.' "

"She will not fail, dear Captain Elmsley! You mean myself; I am the only actress that would dare to face such a trial, and I will do it—to save my husband."

A plenteous flow of tears came to allay her painful excitement, and when she was calm again, she said:—

"There is still a difficulty. Will Mr. Weaver consent to our plan? Will he risk the chances of such a desperate trial?"

"I cannot believe that he will hesitate to

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accept our proposal, and to promise the utmost secresy until the trial has been made. The actors are all perfect, and no rehearsal need take place to-morrow, excepting of your scenes, and those can be gone through with the knowledge of the officials of the theatre, who can be as 'close as death,' when it so pleases them. I will go to Mr. Weaver at once."

The church clock struck one before Elmsley returned, and then he brought the welcome tidings that the experiment was to be made. Florence was to be the *débutante*. Who were to be her auditors?

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CHAPTER VII.

A CONSPIRACY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

On the following morning three conspirators had assembled in the parlour of the old house at Primrose Hill. The Captain, the doctor, and the wife of the sick man up-stairs. Mrs. Elmsley had not been admitted to the conference, as the Captain knew, from past experience, that his lady had not the gift of reticence; her stores of knowledge being limited, she was prone to make much of any domestic mystery which came in her way, and it was very necessary, therefore, that she should not be tempted to make any revelation to Edward, whose nurse she was about to be for the entire day.

The conspirators decided that Florence and Elmsley should leave, ostensibly, to superintend the last rehearsal of the piece, and that they should be understood to dine somewhere near the

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theatre afterwards, and not return until the great event had been decided. The doctor promised to call in, not professionally, but for a chat, as it were, and so keep his patient as much at rest as possible, whilst Elmsley was to despatch an *aide-de-camp* to report progress.

Florence found only Mr. Weaver, the prompter, and the stage-manager, waiting at the theatre to receive her and Captain Elmsley. She rehearsed so perfectly the scenes in which she was to take a part, and accepted the stage directions so readily, that the manager and his professional officers were astonished at what appeared intuition, but which was in reality her own plain sense stimulated into action by affection for her husband, whose life seemed dependent on her compliance with the extraordinary demand now made upon her.

They had just concluded the rehearsal when a lady came upon the stage with a quick step and lively play of the head. Before she had reached the group about the prompter's table she said, in a pleasant voice—

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"Well, Mr. Manager, what's the matter, that I am dragged away in this peremptory manner from husband and child, and my bathing machines, and all that? Eh? what's the matter?"

"My dear Stella"—[Managers always call their pet actresses "my dear," and the lady addressed was a general favourite. She was usually called by her intimates, after a part which she had made famous, in and out of the theatre, and so we will also designate her, Stella.]—"My dear Stella, we are in a great difficulty, you may be sure, or I would not have interfered with your well-deserved holiday."

"There, there, I understand what all that means," interrupted the lady. "What—is—the matter? What am I wanted to do?"

"You have seen, of course, that we have a new piece announced for to-night; also that a young lady was to have made her first appearance."

"And, if successful, to have cut me out of all the pretty young ladies for the rest of my engagement," said Stella, smiling. "Well, I

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don't care much for that; I've looked lovely long enough."

"And look lovely still, dear," said the manager, with a stage manner. "Well—the young lady has taken fright and eloped with her mamma, and so I want you—"

"To read the part to-night? I won't!"

"No, my dear, your kind old manager is not so inconsiderate as that. But he wants you to study the part and play it on Wednesday next—to oblige a young author whose wife I beg to introduce to you," said Mr. Manager, presenting Florence.

"Really this is not fair," replied Stella, curtseying at the same time. "I can't say No, bluntly, to this lady's face, but without knowing what the part is, or—— What do you do to-night, then?"

"The new piece, my dear."

"And who plays the part?" asked Stella, in great surprise.

"This young lady—the brave young wife of the sick author, whose life is thought to be imperilled, should any accident delay the produc-

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tion of this, his first essay." Mr. Weaver then told how it chanced that Florence was able to perform the arduous duty she had undertaken for her husband's sake.

"Oh, you dear, good creature," cried Stella, throwing her arms around Florence. "I will do anything in the world to help such a good wife, and such a good husband, as I am sure he must be."

"I knew you would, my loyal Stella," said the manager. "And now I will tell you what you must do. I will have dinner sent into your room for you and my young friend here, and you must take charge of her for the rest of the evening."

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Stella, clapping her hands. "I will go over your part with you! I will see to your dresses, and initiate you into some of the frauds which we practise upon the noble British Lion when he pays his money at the doors, and believes in all he sees, and wags his tail accordingly."

Florence thanked her new-found friend sin-

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cerely, for she felt how much she should be sustained by the sympathy and assistance of this kind, warm-hearted actress. The Captain and the manager then left them together.

Poor Florence ate little, and would have taken nothing but for Stella, who "kept her courage to the sticking-place" by cheerful counsel and encouraging praise. At Stella's suggestion, the dresses were tried on and little alterations made, which improved their effect, and Florence grew braver, from the consciousness that she had a friend whose experience had already removed some of the misgivings which had beset her, despite her great resolution.

At length the dread announcement was heard! —"Overture on, ladies and gentlemen."

The play commenced, and the first scene of the drama had not been long in action, when a gipsy woman had to enter.

For a moment a sense of sickness overcame the wife-actress, but with an effort of will she shook all fear from her, and walked upon the stage when required to do so, almost as

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confident in herself as the oldest actor beside her.

The applause which greeted her was loud and general, but it produced no feeling of pleasure, nor of increased confidence, in the young *débutante*. She had taken her position on higher principles than a care of self, and she neither courted praise nor feared censure. She was playing for her husband's life, as she believed, and she would strive to win, whatever she might endure.

In a private box, the furthest from the stage, but yet commanding a good view of the scene, sat Mrs. Gregson and her niece, Marian Mayley. Between them were seated Mr. and Mrs. Warner. Warner clapped his hands to give the young *débutante* courage for the task before her, little thinking whose blood flowed in her veins, or what brave woman's spirit she had inherited.

Her face was stained a deep gipsy brown, and her well set figure and graceful motion made her seem, indeed, the most honoured daughter of her tribe—a Bohemian queen.

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When she spoke, her voice was "soft, gentle and low," but so perfectly clear that every word she uttered reached the ears of the listeners. It had touched the heart of one of her auditors, filling it with the music which had been hushed for four long years. Yet there were neither the lithe form, nor the auburn tresses, nor the red and white cheeks of the former singer, and the poor mother believed she only heard the echo of a far-off memory. Lucy, with her eyes still fixed upon the stage, took her husband's hand, and pressed it when the gipsy-player spoke, but it was some time before his ear detected the same song that his wife had heard in the first sentence uttered by the Bohemian. When he understood the significance of Lucy's pressure, he trembled as with a gentle ague, and so continued until he could exclaim, "How very like her voice! How very like!"

From that moment the actress upon the stage became endowed with an interest which made both Lucy and Warner forgetful that they were only spectators of a mimic scene, and all the

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gipsy's sorrows, trials, and temptations, became associated with their absent child, until neither could look longer, and, to the surprise of Mrs. Gregson and her niece, Mr. and Mrs. Warner rose, pleading indisposition as an excuse, and left the theatre.

All their way home, and all the night long, the player's voice sang to them, of their old homes in the far-off colony, and their beloved Florence; they wondering and wondering whether they were listening in a dream that was to be the harbinger of the return of the old singer.

Vincent Elliott having, most provokingly, missed his friend, came to ask shelter in Mrs. Gregson's box, until the piece was over. The seats of the Warners were unoccupied, and therefore, who could refuse him? Not Mrs. Gregson, as she was glad of his company; and Marian—well, she was too much interested in the play, which was drawing to a conclusion, to care about the presence of Mr. Elliott. The curtain fell, and loud was the applause which followed—Vincent Elliott, at Mrs. Gregson's request, bawling lustily

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for the gipsy and the manager. The latter soon appeared, and announced the repetition of the piece on Wednesday next. Why Wednesday? Why not on Monday? The *débutante!* the *débutante* was clamoured for. Why did she not appear? When the curtain fell, shutting out the hundreds of faces, the glaring foot-lights, and all but the noise announcing her husband's triumph, Florence, closing her eyes and clasping her hands together, would have sunk down upon the stage insensible, had not Stella caught her as she was falling, and carried her at once to her dressing-room. The faintness was of short duration, and when consciousness returned, the kind actress was kneeling by the side of Florence and smiling an assurance that all was well.

"My brave, brave girl," said Stella, "you have done your part, your woman's part, your wife's part, nobly. Were ours a happier life than I know it to be, I would praise your acting, and urge you to wear this motley for many a night to come. But yours, I am sure, will be a

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lot more suited to your nature. Home! ah, home without ambition, struggle, success and failure, will be your future. You must leave to us the tinsel honours of the stage, and the feverish strife which wins them."

Florence was too much exhausted to reply but with the briefest thanks, and then her kind friend assisted her at her toilet, allowing none of the ordinary attendants to interpose their officious services.

"It is a fancy of mine," Stella replied, in answer to a gentle remonstrance from Florence. "It is a fancy of mine that you shall have a pleasant remembrance of this night's work if possible, and that when it comes back to you, you will associate me with it, and think kindly of the poor players: as I have helped you this night, you shall help them, should they ever cross your path in need. I should not like you to forget me."

"That I never shall," said Florence, kissing Stella's forehead. "Never; and I trust that the friendship which has begun so strangely may last our lives." And the wish was realised.

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A messenger from Elmsley had conveyed to the doctor the intelligence of the successful progress of the piece, and Florence and the Captain announced the happy termination.

"Thank God that it is over!" said Edward, as he clasped the hands of his faithful clever wife, little thinking then how much he owed to her love.

"I am ashamed of this emotion," he continued, "but the production of that piece had taken such possession of my mind, that to have had to bear longer with doubt would, I fear, have been productive of terrible results; and now to have been so successful! My work and the good kind actors' work also! I will write and thank them to-morrow."

"By the bye," said Florence, "here is a note for you from Mr. Weaver. Shall I open it?" He answered "Yes;" and therefore she broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"My Dear Sir,

"I congratulate you most sincerely on

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the reception of your drama, and I enclose your cheque for £100, being quite contented to bear any future risk.

"Yours truly,

"B. WEAVER."

Kind, considerate man! Such acts will be remembered where our good deeds are recorded, and when the denunciations of fanatic praters, who judge without inquiry and condemn without charity, have passed into air. His name was not forgotten, when earnest words of thankfulness went up to heaven that night from a sick man's bed.

The first battle of life was over, and the spoils had to be gathered only to make the great victory complete. The money was, no doubt, a welcome part of the gains of conquest; but that would be spent in time. There was other booty which remained with Edward and Florence all their lives, and never grew less, but seemed to increase in value as they grew older and dearer to each other.

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Florence sat down by Edward's bedside on the following morning with the newspaper; and spreading it out on the bed, began reading the criticism of her dear husband's play. The plot was ingenious—the language fresh and scholarly, the moral undeniable, and the subject one of domestic life. Then came comments on the acting. Mr. Weaver, one of the best actors of the day, was never more successful; others of inferior merit played most satisfactorily; and Mr. Ranton would have been really excellent, but for the exhibition of over energy. The charming *débutante,*" said the critic, "was undoubtedly the attraction of the evening, and gave a value to the piece which cannot be over-estimated;" and then Florence read such praises of herself, that blushes suffused her face and neck, as a consciousness of self-laudation possessed her, although the words she read had been written by another. Edward observed her flushed cheeks and hesitating manner; and when she paused and could read no further, he requested to know the cause of her confusion.

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To tell him an untruth, to equivocate even to him, were impossible; and so, creeping nearer to him, and laying her head upon his bosom, she confessed to her share in the dreadful conspiracy of the day before, and was pardoned by a hundred kisses from lips no longer feverish with anxiety, and which had received their new health through her bravery and self-sacrifice.

"How noble of you!—how loving of you, dearest Florence," Edward said. "I could not have braved so much, I fear, even to attain the result. How very proud I am of you, my wife! How gratified I am to know that this our first step towards independence has been made together!"

"I am so happy now that you have approved of what I have done," said Florence. "My greatest anxiety was the fear that you might blame me for risking so much. But the end I had in view justified me to myself. And now, dear Edward, there need be no more miserable ponderings on the future. No more fancy pictures of a poor young wife left homeless and penniless, as I have

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known you paint when you thought your gloomy canvas was seen by you alone. No, my dear proud husband, we are now at liberty to seek those who, having loved me through years of waywardness, will not leave me unforgiven for discovering where the happiness of my life was to be found."

Why press him to your bosom, Florence, that he may not reply, and urge the objections raised by his own proper pride to becoming a dependent?

Do you not hear a knock at the door of your old house at Primrose Hill?

No; it was a visitor to Captain Elmsley, who, not having the least idea that he was being received on the door-step by the Captain's lady, did not hesitate to say—

"Captain Elmsley's at home, I believe; I'll announce myself;" and then brushing past the lady into the house, entered the spacious but dilapidated parlour.

The Captain was engaged as we have before described him, attired in the morning

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garment of many patches, and darnings, and washings.

His surprise was considerable at the intrusion of the new-comer, for it was Vincent Elliott.

"Aha!" cried Elliott, snapping his fingers. "Is Columbus outdone? Is Captain Ross extinguished? Have I discovered the domicile of Captain Elmsley?"

The person addressed was too much a man of the world to show that he was taken at a disadvantage, and therefore he replied in the most pleasant of tones,

"What, Vincent Elliott! How do you do? Delighted to see you."

"I must shake hands with you," said Elliott, suiting the word to the action, "to satisfy myself that you are substantial! Ha! ha! Then you do live in a house, and sleep in a bed like other people?"

"Yes!" replied Elmsley, not quite liking Elliott's manner.

"Very retired out here," continued Elliott. "Are villas dear in this neighbourhood? Rather

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queer quarters, Captain! What are you out here? An Indian chief, a refugee, or a field marshal?"

"Fie, sir; fie!" said Elmsley, rather seriously. "You are young. No, my dear boy, I am Captain Elmsley still."

Vincent was rather abashed at this reproof, but he had been induced to be impertinent by the extraordinary contrast presented by the Captain at home and abroad. Elmsley saw that he had countered his man, and wishing to keep friendly with him, pressed his advantage no further, but inquired:—

"By the bye, have you heard anything lately from your innamorata?"

"Yes! I have come to friendly terms with her guardian," replied Vincent.

"That's good news!" said Elmsley. "And is that the reason you have hunted me up?"

"No," replied Elliott, "for, strange to say, he entertains a singular opinion of you—he thinks you—"

"What, sir?" asked Elmsley, sharply.

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"Something like a swindler."

"A what, sir?"

The blood rose red in Elmsley's face.

"I hope, sir, you removed such an impression."

"No; I did not," replied Vincent; "but I will, if you give me authority."

"My authority, sir. Do you consider that necessary, being in this room?" asked Elmsley, putting down his pipe, and rising. "I cannot imagine that you are here to insult me, Mr. Elliott."

"I really came with no such intention," replied Vincent. "Come, Captain, we must not quarrel. I think I know you better now than I did from your own account of yourself, which you must confess was not very explicit. You live more for the world than upon it. Now tell me, you have two lodgers of the name of Norwold?"

"I have."

"Are they at home?"

"They are?"

"Could I see them?"

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"That is for them to determine."

"You're angry?"

"Rather—swindler is a very nasty word, Mr. Elliott. I am a poor man—an idle man—a vain man—but no swindler."

"I believe you, Captain Elmsley, and apologise for so unceremoniously communicating an impression which I am sure will be very soon removed," said Vincent.

"Say no more! say no more!" replied the Captain; "but permit me to introduce Mrs. Elmsley to Mr. Elliott."

He had been constrained to do this, as Mrs. Elmsley, having swept the doorstep to calm her ruffled temper, had no notion of being kept out of her own room by the rude stranger. She had, therefore, entered, and busied herself about until the conversation, taking the animated turn it had done, brought Mrs. Elmsley to the side of her husband, and, by way of conveying the moral support she intended him to receive from her presence she put her arm through his, and leaned upon him, staring Vincent full in the face.

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Elliott expressed the pleasure he had in the introduction, and Mrs. Elmsley was equally charmed at knowing Mr. Elliott. The lady's face was perfectly familiar to Vincent, and associated with some pleasurable recollections, but it was not until she had left the room to announce his desire to speak with Mrs. Norwold, that this impression became sufficiently definite to allow him to assign her a place in the Bar of a well-known hostelry, also in Fleet Street, and rivalling "The Cock" in the succulence of its chops and steaks, and the confusion of its arithmetic.

"You have seen Mrs. Elmsley before, I presume?" asked the Captain, with a smile.

"Such is my impression," answered Vincent, smiling also. "I thought you had been a bachelor. I had no idea that you had practised—what you once called the madman's arithmetic—multiplying misery by two. Sly dog!"

"My dear boy," said Elmsley, resuming his old manner and his meerschaum, "I'll not wrong Mrs. E. A house is not a home without a woman—a paradise with one. Mrs. Elmsley is

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a pattern to her sex, and makes gin-punch better than any woman in the three kingdoms."

"I see"—said Vincent—"you married her for contrast. She is the useful, and you are the ornamental—"

The Captain's lady returned to say that Mr. Elliott being a stranger to Mrs. Norwold, and Mr. Norwold not able to receive him, would he kindly communicate his business to Captain Elmsley?

"Oh! certainly," said Elliott. "The fact is, your lodger, Mrs. Norwold, is the daughter of Mr. Warner!"

"What, *your* Mr. Warner? Strange, indeed!" said Elmsley, "and that they should have been lodging here, and that I should have been of some service to them!"

"I am heartily glad to hear you say so! I have had a long hunt for them, and might have saved myself and others much anxiety, had I made a confidant of you. But—"

"Oh, you were justified in your silence," said Elmsley. "Mr. Norwold told me something of

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his history, but not all. I gathered there had been love and elopement in it. He was the author of the new drama you saw on Saturday night!"

"He the author? Indeed! Quite a romance!"

"Quite — for the lady who played the gipsey was his noble, loving wife!"

"Bless and save us!" cried Mrs. Elmsley. "Why, none of you never told me that, Joe!"

The Captain rather regretted that occasion had been given for Mrs. Elmsley to make a remark.

"And Warner and his wife were there," said Vincent, "looking upon the beloved daughter they had travelled thousands of miles to find! No wonder that the young actress had such a powerful effect upon them both. I had promised to waylay you, and find out who the young lady was, as Warner, I believe, is desirous to make her acquaintance."

Elmsley then explained the circumstances under which Florence had become an actress, and Vincent was loud in expressions of admiration, declaring that Elmsley had proved so good a

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friend, and so clever a general, that he deserved the pleasure of communicating to his young friends the next act of their Life's drama. He therefore left the room to carry the news to the two hearts which had sorrowed long for the one who had been so near to them, and yet they knew it not.

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CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. JELLIFER PROVES A GOOD MATCH FOR HER HUSBAND.

From the time Jasper Jellifer brought home Barbara Raymond as his wife, his condition had been made more comfortable, although the most fanciful of observers would never have discovered Cupids perched in the corners of his dwelling, or turtle-doves cooing under his eaves. No, Mrs. Jellifer moved about her house like an intelligent cat, catching such stray mice as came in her way, rarely showing her claws, and never having scratched Jasper more than once or twice during the long course of their connubial connection. She sometimes, it is true, was betrayed into expressions equivalent to a cat's "swearing," although her expletives were moderately feminine. We are pleased with our simile of a cat, for Mrs. Jellifer went now purring about

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the house, and rubbing round Jasper, as though she had been suddenly endowed with such a stock of affection that its concealment was unendurable.

Jasper was really pleased at these unwonted demonstrations of domestic felicity, and never remembered that the velvet paws were armed with implements of torture, or that cats are of most uncertain natures—loving and treacherous, docile and ferocious, in the same moment.

Mrs. Jellifer was, in reality, quite as good a wife as Jasper desired, and much better, being what she was, than he deserved. There had been small pretence of affection between them; but, as we have said, Jasper loved money, so did his wife, Barbara; Jasper was thrifty, so was she; and Jasper could drive a very hard bargain, and so could Mrs. Jellifer, as our prosperous, lucky, cunning friend was about to discover.

To avoid the expense of a respectable clerk, and to keep the knowledge of their own affairs to themselves, Mrs. Jellifer assisted Jasper in managing his books, and being naturally a quick

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woman, she had readily acquired an insight into the commercial mysteries of single and double entry—mysteries by which ragged boys, with but a shilling in their pockets, are converted into lord mayors with thousands upon thousands at their bankers. Mrs. Jellifer, whilst consulting her husband's ledgers and cash-books, had been much puzzled during the last twelve months to account for moneys which Jasper had received, and, passing them through his books in various complicated forms, would possibly have mystified Mrs. Jellifer herself, had she not had her faculties quickened in a remarkable degree by recent circumstances. She had, therefore, during Jasper's daily absence from the office, made a sort of balance sheet of their possessions, and after setting down the money at the bankers', money invested in loans and mortgages, and other securities, she arrived at the conclusion that Jasper had applied upwards of fifteen hundred pounds to some concealed use. This discovery, instead of annoying her, gave her extraordinary satisfaction, as being another proof of Jasper's perfidious

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disposition, and a further justification of herself for the revenge she had in contemplation. "He would cheat even me!" she thought; "the wife of his bosom—the woman he has endowed with all his worldly goods! You shall keep your word, Jasper, before we have done with each other."

Jasper's tea was very strong that evening, and he slept soundly for three hours.

Mrs. Jellifer, meantime, gave an audience to Jack-in-the-Box in the lower office. That tatterdemalion had brought himself to his present condition by starting in life as a jolly fellow, and "the best of all good company." He had sung and joked himself out of many respectable offices, where drunkenness and irregularity were considered objectionable habits, until he had been glad to hide his seedy garments, and his blotched face, in the dungeon which Mr. Jellifer called his office. He was a shrewd fellow when sober, and the pittance he received was hardly enough for a single debauch in the course of a week—barely sufficient to place two scant meals a day before

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him, and keep a bed under him at night. He still managed, when some of his old cronies did him the unkindness to entertain him, to make a night of it now and then; and the effect of recovering from one of those evenings was to render Jack-in-the-Box very impertinent to his employer in the morning. He had had an orgie on the evening preceding, and Mrs. Jellifer found him in a very consequential mood. He was usually addressed by Mr. Jellifer as "Now, then!" and sometimes as "Now, then, you sir! look to this, and look to that;" but on the days of his exaltation he would answer to no name but Mr. Jerningham.

Mrs. Jellifer was glad to find him so lively, and fancied she could improve the occasion, by requesting him to fetch a quart of ale, or of stout, if he preferred the heavier liquor.

Mr. Jerningham would in his soberer moods have been surprised at this communication and unwonted liberality of Mrs. Jellifer, but the terms he had established with himself throughout the day had become so very high in his own favour, that he considered this quart of liquor as a sort of

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recognition of his proper merits, and he offered no opposition. As he bore the foaming tankard from the public-house to the office, the thirsty devil in his throat cried for a draught, but honour prevailed over it, and the foaming pewter was placed untasted before Mrs. Jellifer, who had during his absence procured two glasses.

Mr. Jerningham, at the lady's request, proceeded with rather an unsteady hand to pour out the nut-brown ale as he called it, and then to bow gracefully, and "wish her every blessing that this transitory world could bestow."

The glass again filled, and Mr. Jerningham seated at his ease on an office-stool, Mrs. Jellifer opened the business she had so pleasantly inaugurated. "Mr. Jerningham," she said, "I have observed with more regret perhaps than you have given me credit for, the very unworthy position you occupy in this office."

The words struck a chord in Mr. Jerningham's bosom, and he instantly seized his glass, and drained it of its contents. Having wiped away the foam from his lips with a piece of waste

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blotting paper, he merely said "Proceed, Ma'am," and resumed an attitude of attention.

"It is not my fault, Mr. Jerningham, that it is so," continued Mrs. Jellifer; "but Mr. Jellifer is, as you may have remarked, a close man."

"——— close!" observed Mr. Jerningham.

"Please don't swear," said the lady. "Now, I am anxious to better your position, if you will allow me."

Mr. Jerningham sat upright on his stool, and rubbed his inky fingers through his exuberant hair, until it looked not unlike a Turk's head broom, but he said nothing.

"You are, I am sure," continued Mrs. Jellifer, "a gentleman—pray fill your glass again." Mr. Jerningham instantly complied with the request. "I am therefore sure that a woman may trust you."

"With life! with honour!" cried Mr. Jerningham, holding high in air the well-filled glass, some of its contents bedewing the extraordinary hirsute crop on the speaker's head.

"I was sure of that, Mr. Jerningham, but as the

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service I require of you may interfere with your leisure, I beg you to accept of this half-sovereign as a compensation for the trouble I am about to give you."

Mr. Jerningham knew his own value too well to hesitate a moment in pocketing the unfrequent coin, and to allow the lady to recover from any temporary embarrassment she might be experiencing he again hid his face in the tumbler.

"Now, sir, for my confidence. You know, I presume, that Mr. Jellifer objects to my being more in the office than is absolutely necessary. I must therefore solicit your assistance in making a discovery which is needful to my peace of mind. Mr. Jellifer is in the habit of receiving certain sums of money which he, for some reason, does not choose to account for in the regular way, and I fancy that you might possibly discover in time some clue to this regular misappropriation."

Jerningham's eyes had dilated during this statement, and he looked round towards the door which led from the office to the dwelling-house. Mrs. Jellifer noticed the action, and said—

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"You will not mind taking a glass which I have not touched," rising and handing her tumbler to the confused Mr. Jerningham. "You need not be alarmed that our conference can be disturbed. Mr. Jellifer sleeps occasionally after his tea, and soundly sometimes. I fancy he will do so to-night. What do you know?" This inquiry was made so abruptly, that Mr. Jerningham bounded up and down upon his stool —and therefore the lady added in a much milder tone, "You do know something, I am certain, Mr. Jerningham."

"You are sure the governor is all right?" asked Jerningham, and being informed that he was, the now half-tipsy fellow continued, "'Woman and wine,' I never could resist ye, and never shall! Madam, you have unlocked my bosom, not with this golden key, but by your condescension and obliging conversation. Through the panel of yonder distant desk, where I pass so many hours of my miserable existence, you will see, upon close inspection, a hole bored by a gimlet. Why? A pardonable curiosity, I trust,

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to keep an eye on what interests my honourable employer. Well, Madam, about twelve months ago, Mr. Jellifer did me the honour to ask me into this inner office, and to take a seat—and nothing else. You were away, Ma'am, at the time, and the governor said he was very lonely, and all that sort of thing, which men are who have no resources, no drink, no smoke. Well, Ma'am, I tried to cheer him up by a recital of my own misfortunes—my own poverty, when he started up and said, 'That's it! That's what I live in fear of! Poverty! a workhouse end! I don't know why, but I believe that the few pounds I have saved will some day slip through my fingers, and I shall be a beggar.'"

"He said that," said Mrs. Jellifer, with open eyes and nostrils. "He said that was his fear. Well, what followed?"

"He then told me of a man whom he had known, who had been possessed with the same fear until he took to robbing himself, and secreting his plunder against the evil day, but his terrors grew too much for him, and he died by his own hands."

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"Well, drink what you have there and then go on. You shall have more money, if you are honest with me," said Mrs. Jellifer.

"The next morning I bored that hole in my desk, and discovered that the governor received small sums, which he did not put into the cash-box but into his pocket. On those days I have seen him busy at the iron chest; and once I entered, unperceived by him, as he was locking the right-hand drawer at the bottom. I should have thought nothing of that, had he not started on seeing me, and, calling me an idle scamp, sent me a longer journey than any mail-coach ever accomplished, Ma'am."

"Mr. Jerningham," said Mrs. Jellifer, "what you have told me has removed much of the anxiety I have lately had on my good husband's account. I am sure I may rely on your secresy, as you may on my best services at any time."

Mr. Jerningham believed in this protestation, as it was accompanied by another half-sovereign, and he went home to his dismal lodging that night

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as happy as a king, if not quite as sober as a judge ought to be.

By the light of a single candle, Mrs. Jellifer —her two elbows resting on the table, and her face between her hands—sat watching the face of her sleeping husband. Her eyes glistened at times, as though her thoughts were so malignant they shone out to warn the doomed man that danger was near him where he sat, beside him in his bed, and afar off in Morden. Yet he had never suspected the chance of evil less than of late, and since there had been moving about his home a gentleness which had been pleasant to him.

When he awoke, he said, with a great yawn, "Dear me, Barbara! I have slept a long time."

"Yes, nearly two hours," replied his wife, with a little hollow laugh. "You would be pleasant company for any one who cared for talking; but I excuse you. I know how much my poor man has to tire him. Here is your biscuit, and glass of table-beer. Take them, and let us go to bed."

Such spare diet, and such thin potations, were

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not likely to produce heavy slumber; but, throughout the night, Jasper Jellifer was insensible to all that was doing in his house.

Mrs. Jellifer was astir about midnight, as Jasper had not gone to bed until past eleven, little thinking how soundly he was to sleep. Having partly dressed herself, she took a bunch of keys from the pocket of her husband's coat, and went downstairs to the office. She then opened the iron chest, and the inner drawer to which Jerningham had referred. There was nothing of value there; two or three canvas money-bags, an odd key, and some letters, tied together by a piece of red tape. She had glanced carelessly at the little bundle of papers, but, as she was about to replace them, the writing appeared familiar to her, and she untied the tape, and read the letters. They were from her dead brother, Raymond Ray, reminding Jasper of their sworn compact to stand by each other in the case of difficulty, and calling upon him to remit the money which had been obtained by the bill of sale. There were painful descriptions of misery

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endured, and of hope deferred; and in the one of latest date a terrible invocation of retribution on Jasper if he was betraying the trust reposed in him by his old confederate. Mrs. Jellifer's eyes glistened with tears at times as she read these miserable proofs of Jasper's treachery and her brother's sufferings; and then all traces of womanly feeling passed away, the lines of her face deepened, and her brow contracted and lowered, whilst her mouth became compressed until the blood left her lips. She refolded the letters carefully, and placing them in their proper order, secured them again with the piece of tape. She was startled by a loud knock at the street door. Again! it was repeated. She knew that Jasper "slept well," or she would have been afraid, perhaps, of detection. Perhaps she had become too desperate, and he too hateful, for her to fear him in any way. Before she could open the door, the knock came again, and she inquired who was there.

"Police," was the reply; "open, if you please."

She complied instantly with this request, and learned that a light having been seen in the office

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at that unusual hour, the officer had considered it his duty to inquire the cause.

"Oh, thank you!" said Mrs. Jellifer, calmly. "I was looking for some medicine in Mr. Jellifer's desk. He has been a little unwell. Nothing unusual. Good night, and thank you for your caution."

To be certain that Jellifer had not been disturbed, she returned to her chamber and looked upon the sleeping man. His face was very pallid and woe-begone, and but for the slight twitching of the mouth might have been that of a dead man. His wife looked upon him unmoved by any touch of pity; and perhaps if he had slept on until the great awakening of all men, she would have rejoiced had her own work been accomplished. She returned to the counting-house and sat pondering before the open chest, confident that there was a hidden secret within it. At last she uttered a sharp Ah! and drew out the drawer which had been so carefully locked, yet contained such worthless matters. She had been recalling all the cunning tricks of concealment of which she heard in her

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early life, and at last it occurred to her that Jasper's hoard was behind the drawer, as it was not in it. She was right. Carefully folded and pressed together she discovered bank-notes of various sums, and amounting to nearly fifteen hundred pounds. That knowledge was enough. She carefully replaced them, locked the drawer and the safe, and then returned to her bed-chamber to lie down calmly by the side of the wretched man she had condemned to a death of torture.

When Jasper rose in the morning, his head was confused and his spirits depressed more than they were usually of a morning, and he complained of his discomfort.

"I am afraid you are over anxious, Jasper," said his wife, "you must not press business so much. You want rest and quiet."

"No, no," replied Jasper, "I could do much more than I am doing. It's not that—I'm out of sorts, as they say; I'll call at a chemist's and buy a penn'orth of something."

"Well, be careful, Jasper, there have been many deaths lately."

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"Always are many deaths," interrupted Jasper.

"Sudden deaths," continued his wife, and Jasper nicked his chin with the razor.

"Husbands and fathers, men of business, cut off in a moment, as it were."

"Well, well, not more than the average," said Jasper, who hated death so much that he had retired from the undertaking business before he left Morden.

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Jellifer. "I think the suddens are on the increase. I suppose, my dear, you have made your will?"

"What an odd question to ask a man before breakfast," said Jellifer.

"I once made the same inquiry at night, and you said what an unpleasant question to ask a man at bed-time. As I am somewhat interested in the inquiry, I will put the question again at dinner time."

"Of course I intend making my will," replied Jasper; "but it's not the most lively thing a man does. It's not pleasant to be bequeathing away all you've got, being certain that you shall be—I

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hate to think of it. And then to know the robbery that you—that is your property is subject to."

"You mean the legacy duty?" said Mrs. Jellifer. "I confess I never think of that but I could cry! How much per cent. is it on legacies to your own family?"

"O horrible!" replied Jasper. "That is the reason I never can make my will."

"But Mr. Greyford avoided it so cleverly; don't you remember?" said Mrs. Jellifer. "What was it he did?"

"Eh?" Jasper did not reply further.

"What was it he gave his wife—a bond—no, it wasn't a bond—what was it, Jasper?"

"I don't exactly know," said Jellifer; "it was a something—a deed of gift I think they called it."

"Ay, that was it!" cried Mrs. Jellifer. "A deed of gift. As he had neither children nor relations—just like you, Jasper—he made a deed of gift to his wife of all he possessed, and so evaded the iniquitous legacy duty. That is what you must do, Jasper. You have no one to care for

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but me, nor have I except you, and so I will give our lawyer instructions to prepare such a deed before the world is a day older. Eh! dear?"

What reason on earth had Jasper to urge against such a proposition? Had she not helped to scrape and scrape through the twenty and more years of their wedded life, and was she to be liable at last to pay legacy duty should she unhappily survive Jasper? He was pressed all through his dressing, his breakfast and his newspaper reading for any proper objection, and he could find none. The deed of gift was to be prepared.

Jasper walked up and down several times in front of his lawyer's office before he could summon resolution to enter and give away—it was giving away—the gains of his mean, grasping, cheating life. There seemed to be no danger in the act, but still he would be on the safe side, and therefore he limited his donation to Lady Norwold's bond and certain other properties, reserving to himself some three thousand pounds for the purposes of business, he said, and——his secret

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hoard, of which he said nothing, either to wife or lawyer. The deed was duly prepared, and to Jasper's surprise Mrs. Jellifer only laughed when she heard the reservation her husband had made. Neither did she show the least displeasure when Jasper desired to wait until the next day before he signed the deed that would make Barbara Jellifer richer than himself. He was restless and thoughtful, but his wife only noted his disquietude to utter words of tenderness and considerateness.

"My dear Jasper," she said—it was not often she had called him dear—"if you regret consenting to this act of prudence, tear the papers, and there is an end. I have no wish to consider myself if it gives you pain. I have told you one and only one of the considerations that moved me to make this request. In justice to myself, I will now mention another. I have seen, how year by year as we have grown more prosperous, our plans of business have enlarged also, and hitherto we have been successful. But every day, almost, I read or hear of some thriving man,

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by an ill-advised speculation, or misplaced trust, becoming ruined, utterly ruined, when he was thought to be above the danger of such a catastrophe. Are we less liable to error? or to become the victims of some misplaced confidence?"

She paused, as Jasper showed by look and manner how closely she had touched him.

"However," she continued, "let us talk no more at present. Think over what I have said, and then do as you consider wisest, and for the best. I can have no interest apart from yours, dear, any more than you can from mine. Hark! There is the clerk calling you."

Jasper rose without speaking to her, although he appeared wistful to say something in reply, but he could command only a ghastly smile, which did not last until he had left the room. When the door closed upon him, the expression of devilish triumph on his wife's face told plainly enough that her revenge was approaching accomplishment, and that if Jasper signed that deed it would be his death-warrant.

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Oh, how she purred about him throughout that long, long evening, and patted him with her velvet paws, until he forgot there had been treachery ever between friends, or strong, destroying hatred begotten by it!

Mr. Jerningham's summons was not to communicate very cheering intelligence. He had heard that a large commission house in the city had been declared insolvent that day, and he was fearful that his worthy employer might have done business lately with them? No. He was glad to know that all accounts were closed between them. He hoped also that the report might prove untrue, but he had heard it. He did not add, however, that it was from Mrs. Jellifer.

Jasper passed a restless night. The strong fear that had of late possessed him lest he should come to want, increased every hour he laid sleepless on his pillow, and Barbara's proposal might therefore be a premonition from the good destiny which had hitherto made him a prosperous man. He would at least divide the risk of ruin by placing confidence in Barbara.

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He knew not what he had parted with when next day he wrote in the presence of proper witnesses, at the bottom of a sheepskin—"JASPER JELLIFER."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE RECONCILIATION.—EDWARD HEARS WARNER'S OPINION OF SIR GILBERT.

Lucy was the first to meet Florence and her husband. The poor mother had sorrowed so long for her lost child, that there was not one reproach remaining in her heart when they were restored to each other. And when she heard the story of her daughter's love, and the strange accidents which had made her marriage seem rash and clandestine, all cause for censure vanished in Lucy's judgment, and nothing remained but thankfulness that Florence had chosen so wisely. Warner loved his child very dearly, also, but his fatherly pride had been offended, and his fatherly love hurt, if not outraged. Yet when he heard the story, first from Lucy's lips, with such extenuations as her mother's love had found, he gave his anger to the winds, and condoned his past distress

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in the joy of once more folding in his arms "the sole daughter of his house and heart." Edward Norwold had won his own claim to honour and regard, and he whose life had been one long exile from home and its affections, now realised them to their full in the devoted tenderness of mother, wife, and father.

Florence had told her parents what Edward's life had been, as he had scarcely referred to himself during the short time they had all been together, partly on account of his present weakness, and partly because he had no pleasure in recalling the past. Warner appeared at first to be incredulous of Florence's statement, not that he doubted her husband's word, but his own parental love had been so strong that he could not compass the idea of a father abandoning a son—an unoffending son, until his marriage with Florence.

When Edward had somewhat reluctantly recapitulated all that we already know, Warner folded his arms as though to control his rising anger, and walked up and down the room before he spoke.

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"And this was his treatment of you, poor boy —his son, and for years his only child!" said Warner. "From his earliest youth he was always crafty, cold-blooded, mean, and deceitful; but the most savage treacherous beast that lives has care for its young, and that instinct secures to it some human sympathy. But this man, gently nurtured, sometime loved, tramples out all the natural affection in his own heart and yours, without remorse or apparent sorrow, to live his own selfish life."

All this was true enough, and Edward had thought it over a hundred, hundred times, from his youth upward, but it sounded strangely coming from another's lips, and for a moment produced a feeling of resentment against the speaker.

"He is still my father, sir," said Edward.

"Your father, Edward Norwold? By what tie, what touch of nature does he claim kindred with you?" asked Warner, passionately. "Your mother, neglected in sickness as in health, her love for you made into her torture, ultimately killing her mind first and then her poor weakened

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body. You, left among strangers to grow into a good man, or a wicked devil; the chances were equal. Thank God! there are kindly, noble hearts as well as evil ones, and you have found them—but what cared he? As you lived, he dared not to desert you—had you died, he would have buried you, and with your bones all fatherly memories and regrets, as he would have buried a hound."

Edward felt his blood stirred by this passionate harangue, and he would have struck one blow for the honour of his father, but there was something in the tone, look, and manner of Warner, which awed him as no man had ever done before.

"Edward Norwold," Warner continued, after a short pause. "You have chosen, unsolicited and unsought by me, to make my child your wife. You have taken from me the one being for whom I have lived and laboured, and I ask, in exchange for that of which you have deprived me, a share in your confidence and affection. I have not spoken without a knowledge of the past and pre-

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sent, and even with some prescience of the future. You are not, cannot be, a son to such a man; and must not affect to have an interest which you cannot feel, or I shall mistrust you in all things else. You have to choose between us. Be prepared to answer."

"Have you then any knowledge of Sir Gilbert beyond what I have communicated," asked Edward, more perplexed by Warner's excitement.

Warner paused in his walk about the room, and sat down in a chair by the table, and covering his face with his hands, said:

"Edward, I dare not pursue this subject further. Never resume it except when I desire you to do so. There must be peace, always peace between us—my son!—my dear son, given to me by my beloved daughter. I will give you half the love of my heart, and will be your father. You must believe that in all I do I am guided by one desire—your happiness—your honour. Florence is the bond which unites us until death comes."

He raised up his head, and there was a

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strange beauty in his face, a solemn earnest look that begat at once the gazer's love and reverence.

Florence had seen nothing of Uncle Jack at present, as from some cause or the other, he had not been to Warner's lodgings for three days. We have told how he had been employed part of that time, and it is fitting that we should account for the remainder. When he returned to London with his exhumed casket, he soon got at the concealed treasure. He first brought forth some papers, and as they afterwards became documentary evidence, we will transcribe them at once.

NUMBER ONE was slightly discoloured, and the ink browned by time, although the writing was perfectly legible. It bore date twenty-six years past, and was headed Norwold Mill. Then followed:

"This box was deposited in Morden churchyard, at the above date, by me, Raymond Ray, Miller, for my own especial purpose. As it is possible that it may be reclaimed by others, I

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now state my reasons for its concealment. I have experienced in my intercourse with the world treachery where I least expected to find it, and I have suffered want when there were none to help me, so that I have resolved to secure myself against such chances for the future. None ought to blame me for this precaution should it ever come to the knowledge of others concerned in my proceedings; and it will not do so if I am fairly dealt by. My present business exposes me to great risk; and, therefore, I have given to my brother-in-law a bill of sale over everything I possess, in order that he may take precedence of any other claimant. For my own security I have received from him a similar instrument, which will be found enclosed with this statement."

Jack looked into the box and found the paper referred to by Ray. It was a bond apparently duly drawn and signed by Jasper Jellifer, and acknowledging his indebtedness to Ray for twelve hundred pounds. It was dated six and twenty years ago, and one day earlier than the preceding

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document. Jack remembered well that Jellifer had produced a similar deed after Ray's conviction, and superseded the claim made by the Crown to the property of the felon. Cunning Jasper Jellifer, thought Jack, there can be no doubt now that he was aware of all Ray's villainy, and a sharer also in the gains accruing from it; but, fox that he was, he kept out of the reach of the law. No doubt, either, that when he grew fearful of discovery, he had betrayed his less careful partner, and that all Ray had suspected in later years was true. The long forgotten incidents of the detection, trial, and after consequences came back to Spraggatt's recollection as plainly as though a day only had intervened since their occurrence.

Treacherous—heartless villain!

The wretched man who had crawled to Jack' home in the Bush came vividly before him, and seemed to demand justice at his hands. Was it his duty to become the avenger?

Let him read on.

"What else the box contains was obtained by

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our joint means, and with our mutual knowledge; but as it provoked some very unpleasant consequences, I promised to bear all blame, and therefore claimed possession, as the time might come when its value would rescue me from such poverty as I have known more than once in my short and eventful life."

Jack removed a small quantity of tow, and as he did so, was surprised to observe something glitter beneath it. He removed the remaining covering and found a diamond bracelet, containing a faded miniature of the late Sir John Norwold!

Jack's brain swam when he saw this, and he fell back into his chair! If Sir John himself had looked up at him from the grave, he could hardly have been more overpowered.

That bracelet which had changed the current of more lives than one—that had brought shame and misery, and large happiness also,—buried as it had been from the sight of man for all the years those changes had been coming and departing,—was now brought again into the light of day to work more good or evil by his agency! How many

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years he had borne about with him the secret of its existence, and yet knew it not. How it had found him thousands of miles away in the lonely Bush, when he had hardly thought to tread English ground again. How the wretched, dying convict had struggled through the tangled forest, and over the great plain to make him this bequest. All! all impressed him with the certainty that the hand of Providence was here, and that he had It's work to do.

There was more writing folded up within the circle made by the bracelet.

What would it reveal? He almost feared to open the folds and read. When he had done so he fell upon his knees, and his broad breast heaved like a troubled sea.

The lines which he had read were commonplace, and "earthy" enough.

Simply these:

"I have this day received £200 of Raymond Ray, Miller, and placed with him a diamond bracelet as security, until the repayment of the money."

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Ray had written those lines, but there were two words more affixed to them, which gave such value to the whole that John Spraggatt, remembering the friend of his youth, had fallen upon his knees and given thanks for them. Those words were "GILBERT NORWOLD."

Warner had gone into the City, and Florence and her mother were standing at the window, each encircled by the other's arm, when Uncle Jack was seen coming up the street. Florence uttered a little cry of delight, and hoped that the dear old uncle would look up, and see her at home again. She was to be disappointed, for Jack kept his eyes bent on the pavement, as though he were in deep thought, but he sailed along at a tremendous rate, and must have run into much craft, on his way from the City, if he had kept such a blind reckoning and carried such a press of sail.

Why those nautical metaphors should have overtaken us, we know not, unless they came consequent upon Jack wearing a pea-jacket, his hands thrust into its pockets, and his elbows

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very much a-kimbo. When the door had been opened, Jack entered the passage, and was considerably surprised at being violently assailed by some one, who nearly strangled him in the embrace of two soft arms around his neck, then nigh smothering him with kisses,—kissing his great grizzly beard, shaggy eyebrows, rosy nose, sunburnt cheeks—indeed everywhere that a kiss could be implanted. What a shout he gave when he discovered that his assailant was his pet, his darling, his lost Florence! It was a wondrous sight, to see that burly fellow sitting on the stairs, his face hidden by his knuckles, with which he was punching his eyes, to keep back the joy that was trying to find vent, welling up from his great loving heart. And when he had succeeded, and made his eyes very red, he looked at his darling again, and opening his arms hugged her to the bosom of his pea-coat, till the embrace became painful to Florence on account of the buttons. She bore it all, however, as though she had been nestling on the downy breast of a halcyon. Dear old Uncle

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Jack! who had blamed himself so often for having advised that terrible journey to Paris, and which had ended in making her so very, very happy. And now to be sitting on that broad knee, whereon she had ridden to Banbury Cross in the old location kitchen, and under the old location verandah—that knee, which had been bent in humble prayer for her when her after-fate was unknown—seemed so like a dream, that she was obliged to pull his great bushy whiskers to satisfy herself that all was real again.

And then she led him up-stairs, like Beauty and the Beast, to be introduced to her dear husband—Jack's new nephew. He loved him at first sight, did Jack, and was perfectly of Lucy's opinion, that had Florence made herself miserable for life, by rejecting such a good fellow, Aunt Letty and brother-in-law Monsieur would all have been to blame. As Jack was an old-fashioned Church of England man, and took a very simple view of the Bible, he fancied he could trace a guiding hand in all that was known, and in all that had been revealed by himself,

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in the box which he had dug out of Morden church yard.

Jack had come direct to Warner's house, hoping to find him absent, in order that he might take counsel with Lucy upon the course of action to be followed in consequence of his great discovery; and his purpose would have been defeated, as Florence would not let him out of her sight for some time, had not Warner been detained by an unexpected visitor from the City, in the person of Mrs. Jellifer. She had come to see Mr. Spraggatt, but as he had told her he was only the agent for Mr. Warner, in a certain matter of business with her husband, she asked to see that gentleman, in Mr. Spraggatt's absence. Mr. Warner was averse to the interview, but the lady was so pressing that he consented at last to receive her.

"She had come," she said, "at the request of Lady Norwold, who had a particular favour to ask. In the ensuing week would be the birthday of Sir Gilbert, and it was her custom to wear the family jewels upon family occasions.

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She was not prepared to repay the money, but she asked the custody of the diamonds for the one night, pledging her honour for their return."

The request was unreasonable. Any other business?

"Yes." Mrs. Jellifer produced the bond her ladyship had given to her husband, Jasper. It secured three thousand pounds, but as money was needed, and Mr. Jellifer could not press for payment, it would be transferred to Mr. Warner for a much less sum.

Mr. Warner would consider that proposal, and answer it on the morrow. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Mr. Spraggatt had given Mr. Jellifer a large sum of money for some very trifling information concerning Mr. Edward Norwold. Might she ask the reason?"

There was no secret now. Mr. Norwold had married Miss Warner, and his residence could not be discovered by Mr. Warner on his coming to England.

"I concluded that was the cause," said Mrs.

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Jellifer. "I remembered that he had married a governess named Warner, and been turned out of doors by his father. You would like, I suppose, to have them reconciled?"

"No."

"Oh, yes, you would, sir; and I fancy I could make Sir Gilbert listen to you, if you desired it. I don't care for—I mean I don't want money for my assistance," said Mrs. Jellifer; "but you must be resolute if you would be successful!"

"It is useless speaking in riddles to me," said Mr. Warner; "either make your meaning clear, or leave me to my other business."

"What is the punishment for perjury?" asked Mrs. Jellifer—"transportation, is it not? Or, at any rate, long, very long imprisonment?"

"I believe it is," answered Warner.

"Then I can tell you when Sir Gilbert profited by another man's false-swearing, Mr. Warner; and if he knows that you are aware of that fact, will he not listen to any proposal you may make for the acknowledgment of your daughter?"

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Warner guessed at her meaning, but he was anxious to hear further.

"Perhaps it would," he replied. "Yes; I should say certainly it would."

"I will do this on one condition, Mr. Warner," said Mrs. Jellifer—"that you pledge me your solemn word that when you have served your turn you will serve mine—that you will prosecute the perjurer—hunt him down, sir, as he once hunted another. I can show you the way, and without compromising Sir Gilbert, should you not wish to do so. Sir Gilbert is an unscrupulous man, and will be glad to be rid of the miserable tool he wants no longer."

Warner was amazed at his own conjectures, so unnatural did they appear, and he asked:

"Who is the perjurer?"

"No," replied Mrs. Jellifer. "I have not done my own business yet. I have this bond to sell—here is my authority to do so—a deed of gift. I want your pledge, also, to follow the other matter to the end."

"I will buy the bond," said Warner, "and I

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will pledge my word to see justice done. Who is the man?"

Mrs. Jellifer sat silent for a few moments, and then she said in a low voice:

"I will come again to-morrow. I thought I could have been bold enough to have spoken all I wished to say. I cannot."

"To-morrow be it then," replied Warner. "Come to my house in —— Street, by ten o'clock, and if Lady Norwold will call upon me at one on the succeeding day, I will possibly accede to her request."

Mrs. Jellifer thanked him, and then withdrew.

Mr. Warner walked home very thoughtful and perplexed. He had been long convinced that some chicanery must have been practised to have made his brother's possession of the title and estates so easy; and now he was to have forced upon him a knowledge which he had not sought to obtain since his return to England. Who could be the man? He had thought of Jasper Jellifer—yet he was the woman's husband; a generous one, it seemed, by the deed of

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gift which had been shown that day. Conjecture was at fault, and the morrow must be waited for.

When Lucy had listened to Jack's revelations, she anticipated with sad forebodings their probable effects upon her husband. She believed that he had never entirely overcome his desire to regain his lost position, despite his frequent struggles with himself, and she now foresaw that the resumption of the subject would be likely to produce results which would militate against the future happiness of all who were most dear to her; and she therefore awaited Warner's return with great anxiety. When he came home she called him into the breakfast-room, and, having prepared him gently for a disclosure of some importance, informed him of all which she had learned from her brother. The production of the bracelet affected Warner greatly, and the paper which had accompanied it much more so. For some minutes he could not speak, but held the two evidences of his innocence and the injustice which had been done to him in his hand, gazing at them vacantly.

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"At last!—at last the proof has come," he said. "The dead has spoken, and his voice shall be obeyed. The cold heartless villain shall meet the punishment he so richly merits. He shall be humbled in the dust, and the finger of the scorner shall point at him as he lies grovelling in his shame. Eternal justice would not let such iniquity live prosperously to the end, and I—the dishononred—am destined to declare the hypocrisy and baseness of this bad man's life. Remorselessly as he has pursued his wicked will, I will pursue him. I will forget nothing which I suffered, but, remembering all, will repay my own wrongs, my father's miserable end, when knowing that he had dealt unjustly by his misjudged son. I will reach this man where only he is vulnerable, and beggar him in name and fortune. Liar, thief, and perjurer,—without one kindly touch in his whole heart—I will drive him into exile as he drove me, but without one solitary hope, one sustaining recollection."

Exhausted by his passion, he paused, and Lucy regarded him in painful silence for some minutes.

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At last he looked at her, and noting her mute distress, said, "Am I not right?"

"No," she replied, gently. "Is revenge to be your acknowledgment for all that God has done for us? For enabling you to resist the terrible temptations which beset you in your first sorrow, and you have told me what they were? For giving you strength of will and energy to shape a new course, and make it prosperous? For giving you my love, which you have proved and tried in many an hour of sorrow, and said, how often! that in my well-deserved devotion you have found more happiness than you had ever dreamed of? For our beloved child, whose infant life was one long blessing, hardly known, hardly acknowledged, until we thought that she was lost to us! For the inexpressible joy which her return has given, knowing now that her love for us was unchanged, and that she has proved herself worthy to be loved and honoured? Are blessings such as these to be paid by revenge, when God has commanded us to forgive, and shown us how much we need forgiveness when striving at our best?"

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She had risen whilst saying this, and had placed her arms around her husband's neck; but the evil spirit which had been raised was not then to be driven forth; so he unclasped her hands, as though to avoid further reproof or remonstrance, and went out into the street.

Lucy did not despair of her words having reached his heart, and she had prayed earnestly that they might prove of good avail more than once before he returned to her, silent and sorrowful.

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CHAPTER X.

THE SHADE OF AN OLD WRONG HAUNTS WARNER'S HOUSE.

WARNER was reserved and silent the next morning when the family assembled at breakfast, and as this was unusual with him the influence extended to the whole party, until no one spoke a word. Lucy strove hard to conceal her own disquietude, but in vain; and, at last, feeling unable to command herself, she rose and left the room. Warner followed her with his eyes, as did Florence also; and when he perceived that Lucy's uneasiness had become manifest to her daughter, he said:

"Florence, dear, go to your mother; she will be glad of you."

The request had not to be repeated, and Florence left the room instantly.

Warner remained silent for a few moments,

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and then said, "Edward, we once spoke upon a subject which was painful to both of us, and I requested that it might not be resumed until I desired it. I was unduly excited, perhaps, at that time, and may have misunderstood the exact relations which have existed between you and your father. Did I understand rightly that he had separated you from your mother when she was ill—dying?"

"I am sorry to acknowledge that such was the case," replied Edward.

"You were then taken abroad, and left entirely to the care of strangers?"

"Nearly so. My father visited me at long intervals, and upon one occasion — only one — took me to England for a very short time."

"But you were always in communication with him, and could have advised with him on the important step you took when marrying Florence?"

"Yes, sir," replied Edward, colouring slightly; "and had I not been certain of his answer, I should have done so. But he had made himself

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no place in my heart—he had never shown me that I had a place in his—and the new existence I had found in Florence's love, and the sympathy of her friends, was such a blessed change from the isolated life I had lived hitherto, that I resolved to brave the worst that he could add to his previous cruelty, and so I married."

"Have you regretted offending him?" asked Warner, looking at Edward steadfastly as he spoke.

"Regretted it, sir! No—not even when my future appeared to be almost desperate, except for the sake of her whose fate I had made my own. What has he since done to call for regret? Without one word of inquiry, has he not remorselessly abandoned me, nor cared whether I starved or prospered!"

Warner again paused before he spoke.

"And Lady Norwold, was she as indifferent as her husband?"

"I had no claims upon her," replied Edward. "She, a woman of the world, was only anxious to pursue her pleasures undisturbed; and Sir Gilbert

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was not the most amenable of husbands, even to her who had brought him wealth, which my poor mother had failed to do. Lady Norwold dared not risk the slight hold she had upon her husband's courtesy, for he showed her nothing more—and to have advocated my cause, would have been to have incurred uselessly my father's displeasure. During my stay in their house, she endeavoured to make it a home; nor was she altogether unmindful of Florence either. I have no resentment against her. She acted according to her teaching. She lives only for herself."

"You have no resentment against her? Have you against your father?" Warner asked, again regarding Edward most earnestly.

"I dare hardly answer no, for I cannot speak untruly to you," replied Edward, "although I would take no active means to show my feeling towards my father," adding, after a pause—"even to regain my proper position."

"Why not?" asked Warner, sharply. "Why should you hesitate, if, by humbling this proud,

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bad man, you could compel him to recognise you as his son, and—" he stopped speaking.

"Perhaps you will condemn my reasons and think them foolish," answered Edward, with some hesitation. "You may fail to understand them, perhaps."

"What are they, Edward? Speak freely, that I may judge correctly."

"I will, sir. You, as I have heard, have made your own name honourable, and the wealth you possess has been acquired by your own skill, probity, and endurance. You have a right, therefore, to consider no other qualities, no other distinctions, valuable or ennobling. I have been accustomed to think differently. I am not the first of my name—I have an ancestry, and any shame or humiliation which touches my father, must sully the bright memories of those who have made our house noble and honourable. Do you understand me, sir? Do you excuse, even if you cannot approve, the motives which make me tolerant of my wrong, and which, even for her dear sake, I hesitate to cast aside?"

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Warner's face appeared aglow with pleasure, and that strange beauty which had before possessed it came back, and commanded, as it were, the love and reverence of his son. He rose and took Edward's hand.

"Do I understand you? Yes. Do I approve your motives? Yes, as though I claimed kindred with the ancestry of which you are so worthy! I will try to school myself by your example; but I have also a wounded pride to cure, and a sense of wrong to tame into forgiveness, my noble, honourable, much-loved son. I may come to you for counsel."

Mr. Warner then left the room, and Edward remained pondering on what had passed, naturally attributing the concluding words addressed to him as referring to Warner's resentment at the insulting rejection of his daughter, and was not surprised, therefore, when he had narrated what had occurred to Lucy and Florence, that the former uttered earnest words of thankfulness, that the sorrow which had threatened them was about to pass away, and

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leave them a future unembittered by an irremovable regret.

Warner had scarcely recovered his usual equanimity when Mrs. Jellifer was announced. As the door opened to admit her, Warner felt that indefinable sensation which accompanies the presence of a noxious thing, and it required some effort before he could speak to her, and desire her to be seated. He had a great end to obtain, and therefore he controlled the disgust he felt for this treacherous woman, and whose wicked purpose he had not the intention to accomplish.

"I have considered your proposal, Mrs. Jellifer, and will take your bond; but I decline to make a profit of your necessities. This note to my lawyers authorises them to pay you the money, and to take the proper transfer. Read it, madam; and see that it is satisfactory."

"Really, sir," replied Mrs. Jellifer, with some trepidation, "you are very kind, and I accept your liberality with thankfulness."

She folded the letter again slowly, and was about to return it to Warner, when he motioned

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her to retain it, as though unwilling to touch anything with which she had been in contact.

"Yesterday," he said, "you proposed to make a certain revelation to me affecting, I presume, your husband, and, as I understood, made it a condition that I should act upon it. Are you still desirous to do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go on."

Mrs. Jellifer continued silent for some moments.

"Will you permit me first to make some excuse for such apparently unwomanly conduct, sir?"

Warner bowed.

"You must be surprised that, after obtaining such liberal gifts from my husband, I should seek to do an act of justice by which he may suffer. There was no favour conferred by his gifts, as I had earned, by many years of care and industry, all that I have obtained at his hand. I am not, therefore, ungrateful."

"Why, then, revengeful?" asked Warner, coldly.

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"For that I can give you sufficient excuse, sir," said Mrs. Jellifer.

She found great difficulty in going on, as it was evident to her that Mr. Warner held her somewhat in contempt. She therefore changed her tactics, and continued.

"Why I have sought to acquaint you with this particular act of villany may seem still stranger to you, sir; but when I saw you yesterday, for the first time, it came into my head as it were in a moment, that I might accomplish my own object, and serve you in the business which has perhaps brought you to England."

"Serve me?" asked Warner, with more interest than he had otherwise shown.

"Yes, sir. It had reference to the Norwold family, for I had not been talking to you five minutes when I felt as though the late Sir John was sitting before me. I then remembered your connection with Mr. Spraggatt—the late Mr. Gerard's going away so strangely, and I believed he had come back again to claim his rights, and that you were he."

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Warner had not been prepared for this, although he had thought some recognition of him not impossible, and therefore he had avoided hitherto all places and persons connected with his early life, except Mrs. Jellifer. He, however, kept command of himself and replied calmly:

"People are apt to fancy resemblances which only exist in their own imaginations, and your mind had been set upon this revelation, and so connected me with the object of it. What is it you have to disclose?"

Mrs. Jellifer was beaten back. She had had the impression which she described, and the remembrance of Jasper's perjury had come after it. She then proceeded to describe the part which Jellifer had taken when Sir Gilbert sought to recover the title and estates of Norwold, and detailed the circumstantial and positive evidence of Gerard's death in Italy, as sworn to by her husband.

"And this with Sir Gilbert's knowledge?" asked Warner.

"Yes, sir, although that would be difficult to prove. In that paper you will find Jellifer's evi-

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dence arranged by him in order to keep it in his recollection."

She laid the paper upon the table, as Warner did not offer to take it from her.

"Will you write out your knowledge of that transaction, and let me have it to-day?" asked Warner.

"I will, sir; and I have other papers confirming what I have stated to you."

"Mrs. Jellifer," said Warner, after a pause, "I have known some and heard of many bad men and women who have lived by fraud and crime until detection overtook them and brought them to punishment; but even when the husband has been brutal and the woman lost and depraved, it has never fallen within my knowledge that the wife has betrayed the guilty partner of her life; but has rather sought to suffer, and striven to screen him at her own self-sacrifice. Your life may have been made up of trickery and fraud, but you could not have become so debased as to be guilty of the treachery you design without other cause than you have named to me."

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"True, sir," said Mrs. Jellifer, stung to the quick by Warner's observation; "true—I should have deserved all the contempt I can trace in your looks and words. I would not have deserted any man I had loved, or had even professed to have loved, for twenty times Jasper Jellifer's possessions. It is because I did love one man dearly—he was my brother, sir—and know that he was hunted to death by this cold-blooded man whom I must call my husband, that I have resolved to revenge his miserable end. Here are copies of my brother's letters—the originals shall be forthcoming, if needed—showing the misery he suffered, and the treachery Jellifer practised towards him. Read them, sir, and then say if he deserves pity from you, or consideration from me—the sister of Raymond Ray, whom he murdered less mercifully than if he had shot him down on the highway."

Warner hesitated to read the copied letters from Raymond Ray to Jasper, but Mrs. Jellifer was so earnest in her appeal, that at last he consented to do so.

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"A wretched story, truly," said Warner, when he had finished, "and more so, if I understand that all those appeals were made in vain."

"They were," she exclaimed; "and be my brother's death mine, if I do not requite his betrayer."

Warner was sickened by the perusal of such wretchedness, and the knowledge of such wickedness, and therefore he rang the bell.

"You will let me have the statement I require, and be sure you communicate its contents to no one."

"I will not, sir," said Mrs. Jellifer, going; she paused at the door to say, "I had forgotten to tell you, sir, that I have seen Lady Norwold, and she will be with you at two to-day. She was very angry, but for that you need care but little. She must at any price have the jewels, sir. Good day."

When Mrs. Jellifer left Mr. Warner she went direct to a coffee-shop, and there fulfilled her promise of committing to paper her knowledge of her husband's perjuries; having completed her

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work, she left it at Warner's door, and returned to her home in the City.

Warner had remained alone in his study, deliberating upon the course he should pursue. His wife's remonstrance, and the interview with Edward, had tended greatly to shake his resolution to resume his ancestral rights, although circumstances had conspired to make the establishment of his claims easy of accomplishment. He had only to proclaim himself the wronged heir of Norwold, like some hero of fable, to confound his wicked brother and revenge his own great injuries. Was this to be his course? He would seek the counsellor — the friend whose simple wisdom and truthful love had been his guide and comforter through years of happy exile in the distant Bush, when all the feverish dreams which now made his days restless appeared to have been dispelled for ever. Yes, Lucy should be heard again, and by her decision he would abide, if possible. When she had joined him in his room, he placed in her hands the confession of Mrs. Jellifer.

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"These proofs multiply, my love," said Warner: "they are thrust into my hands as it were by some special influence, to be used for good or evil. Even my father's look has not left my face. Hard toil, and business cares, have not removed the Norwold impress from me, and this base woman Jellifer recognised in me the resemblance to my father. The dead have given up their secret, and placed proofs at my command. For whom?"

"Your daughter, whom you love! For the noble son who has come to bless our old age, and to wear some day your ancient honours without tarnish," replied Lucy. "Shall it not be so, my dear, dear husband? Shall we present to them as their wedding portion the knowledge of Gilbert Norwold's wickedness, to raise in the young husband's mind, perhaps, mistrust of his own worthiness, being the son of a bad father, and create an ever-present fear in that of the young wife, that Edward may do such injustice to his own deserts. Where we would sow only flowers, shall we scatter the seeds of poisonous

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weeds, which in time may destroy the sweetness of their lives?"

"Be it as you decide. From this hour, I erase my name from the roll of chivalry, and inscribe it in good text-hand in the Commercial Ledger, 'George Warner,' provided always, as those cunning lawyers say, when they would find a loophole for escape from a doubtful bargain—provided always, that I can bring this bad baronet—what is his name?—Sir Gilbert Norwold, to such terms as I shall dictate. So kiss me, good wife, and there—I deliver that as my act and deed." The kiss he gave as he pronounced those words of power, was not upon a skin of parchment, but upon a buxom cheek, now glowing with happiness unspeakable.

"You must not be jealous, dear Lucy," he said; "but I am about to receive a lady of fashion at two o'clock; guess her name!"

Of course Lucy could do no such thing.

"Lady Norwold. Oh! quite on a matter of business," said Warner, smiling; "and I promise you, for the honour of my new profession of

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money-lender, she shall pay good interest. 'The pound of flesh nearest her heart' if she have one. Until her arrival, I have a letter of importance to write. Let her ladyship be shown into the drawing-room, but do not you receive her, as she comes upon business—mere business."

He had scarcely finished his letter, and despatched it—it was to Sir Gilbert—when a hack fly, containing Lady Norwold and her maid, drove up to the door. Her ladyship only entered the house, and was shown into the drawing-room. The house in which Warner resided had been taken furnished as it was, and Lucy's taste and Warner's liberality had made the apartment very elegant, to the evident surprise of Lady Norwold.

"Well, sir, good morning; you seem to take a pleasure in putting me to as much inconvenience as possible over this business, Mr. Warner."

"I regret that your ladyship should think so," replied Mr. Warner. "I endeavoured to lessen your trouble by inviting you to call here, rather than at my agent's office."

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"Well, this is a more agreeable place than that horrible hole in the City. I declare, some of your things are charming. Well, Jellifer has told you what I require, and you consent to oblige me?"

"I have not done so at present," replied Warner; "though I daresay your ladyship will not object to the terms I shall require."

"Not if you show any conscience at all; and I must say you were not so rapacious as Jellifer, who holds my bond. By the bye, that's a very dangerous thing, is it not?"

"Very, my lady; unless it receives the greatest attention, it becomes very troublesome. Will not your ladyship be seated?"

"No, thank you; I like to walk about and look at your *bric à brac*, much of it being pretty. But don't let me keep you standing with that armful of papers."

Warner accepted her permission to be seated, and arranged his papers very methodically before him.

"Well, what is this interest to be? Is this

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Sèvres?—it is, I declare—and I shall pay for it, I suppose. What is this interest to be?" said Lady Norwold.

"I am no stranger to your ladyship's liberality," replied Warner; "but these diamonds are very valuable security—very valuable to me."

"And to me also, I can assure you. They are family diamonds, and there is always a family fuss about them."

"Do you not admire diamonds?" asked Warner.

"Of course, I do," said her ladyship, with a pretty laugh. "What woman does not? Many hearts have been won by a suite of diamonds."

"Hearts?" asked Warner, archly.

"Well hands," said her ladyship; "they are nearly synonymous now-a-days."

"Too true, I fear," said Warner, displaying the gems upon the table, "the happiness of a life bartered for a piece of crystal, to which fashion alone gives value."

"Poor fashion!" replied her ladyship, examining through her glass a painted cabinet of great

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beauty, presented to Warner by his colonial friends. "Poor fashion! Why affect to despise that which you take so much pains to imitate? Who would think that the chrysalis of the City could develop into such a butterfly at the West-end!"

"Surely a pardonable love of good taste—"

"Taste! Pshaw! and yet you pretend to despise fashion! You railers at the follies of the world have the cowardice to follow without the courage to lead. Well—have you done figuring? What am I to pay? I must not be without my diamonds on Sir Gilbert's birthday."

"Nor shall you, my lady," said Warner, calmly.

"Well, that's kind of you, my dear sir. I cannot expect you not to charge for the accommodation, and I have no right to ask you to confide in my word."

"You have not heard me to an end, madam," said Warner. "As your ladyship cannot give me any equivalent security for these diamonds, you shall have them for the night, provided—"

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"What? Go on, man."

"Provided I am allowed to be present during the evening."

"In what capacity?" asked Lady Norwold, in surprise.

"As a friend."

"As a friend of mine! In my own house. Does the man think me mad?" cried her ladyship, looking daggers, or bodkins, at Warner. Place a money value on your obligation, and I will pay it—"

"I have money obligations sufficient of yours already, Lady Norwold," said Warner, "and am not disposed to increase them. There is your bond to Jasper Jellifer, which I have purchased, beside the advance made upon these gems. Are you prepared to redeem them to-morrow, madam?"

"To-morrow! You know I am not, sir! How can you ask such a ridiculous question?" replied Lady Norwold.

"Then I shall sell these diamonds forthwith by public auction."

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"What, sir?"

"I shall describe them as late the property of Lady Norwold," said Warner, calm as ever.

"You cannot be such an unfeeling monster!" cried Lady Norwold. "You would not estrange husband and wife; and for an act of indiscretion consign me to exposure and disgrace!"

"Why not, madam?" said Warner, rising up, and confronting the angry lady's glance unmoved —"Why not? For a more venial fault than deceiving a husband, did you and Sir Gilbert Norwold condemn his son and my daughter to penury, for what you cared."

"Your daughter! Was Miss Warner your daughter?"

"Yes, my lady. Is not the retribution a just one? My child's virtues, helplessness, and true position, were unregarded by you. When, perhaps, a word might have obtained justice for her and her husband, you would not speak it."

"I did not dare to do so, Mr. Warner."

"No—your own selfishness would not let you risk the chance of some discomfort; you knew

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your husband was a hard man to move to pity or to justice, and your love of ease would not let you make the trial."

"My first impulse was to have done so, but I knew my words would have fallen upon a deaf ear."

Warner was pleased at this admission, though he said:

"You should have listened to your woman's heart, not silenced it by the louder voice of self, Lady Norwold. You knew how good, how worthy of her husband's love, my daughter was; and yet you would not disturb one indolent hour to rescue her from days of sorrow. Why should I spare you?"

"Why should you? I have nothing to urge in mitigation of your just retaliation. I cannot descend to plead," replied Lady Norwold, with dignity.

"Madam"— said Warner, in a softened voice— "you need not. There are your diamonds. Keep them as your own until I require them of you."

"Sir!"

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"Pray accept them on my conditions. Now you are at liberty to act as seems most worthy your position and your duty."

"Mr. Warner, I will accept these gems in trust from you, and, perhaps, they may have returned to me of greater value than when I parted with them. To prove that may be so, I will now endeavour to extenuate myself, and strive to gain some of your good opinion. Imagine, if you can, what has been my nurture. From my earliest years I have had every wish considered, if not gratified. Those from whom I have exacted service have rendered it so readily—sometimes abjectly—that I have never thought I was receiving favours from creatures like myself, but only accepting as my birthright what I needed at their hands. You were right. I did not care to have my ease disturbed. I saw no claim that your daughter had to make her interest paramount to my own, and it was mine not to offend Sir Gilbert. I think I should not be so minded, were like events again to give me a choice of action."

"You do!" said Warner, joyfully. "If you

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knew the pain those words have spared me, madam, you would no longer think yourself my debtor. It may so happen that your intercession will be needed. May I count upon it?"

"You may, Mr. Warner, to the uttermost."

"I thank you, madam. Possibly you will fail the first time in your advocacy—you shall not the second, take an old man's word."

Warner then conducted her ladyship to her carriage, and bore himself so much like a gentleman, that the invitation he coveted did not seem to be so impossible, certainly not so alarming. The selfish crust about Lady Norwold's heart had cracked in many places, and possibly she might come to have a freer pulse and a wider sympathy.

The mirthfulness of the guests assembled round Warner's dinner-table that evening, was in pleasing contrast to the tristeness of the morning gathering. By one of those remarkable arrangements of the fitness of things, Marian Mayley was seated between Edward Norwold and Vincent Elliott, and Uncle Jack had found anchorage between Florence and Mrs. Gregson. The yellow

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turban was disposed to be frolicsome and mischievous, as it was shaken more than once playfully at Marian, and again oscillated fearfully when its owner remarked, "that she did believe Feberawary had come again, and that they were pairing as though it had been Valentine's day"—so much was Mrs. Gregson tickled at her own funniness. Marian had been too long accustomed to her aunt's little eccentricities to be angry with her, and the others were too kindly and gentle to create any embarrassment by appearing to notice them.

Dinner over, Florence pretended suddenly to remember that it was Uncle Jack's birthday, and in a pretty, loving speech, proposed his health, and holding his great rough head between her hands, gave him a dozen kisses at least, upon all the clearings she could find in his forest of beard. Mrs. Gregson seemed disposed to follow Florence's example, but was deterred by the effort necessary to rise, and the hirsute difficulties to be encountered. Before Jack could say a word in reply, Mr. Warner, taking advantage of the occa-

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sion, declared what a true, steadfast friend, what a dear, loving brother, and affectionate uncle, Jack had been, and how much they were indebted to his unselfish nature for happiness, past, present, and to come.

Jack returned his thanks in a short blundering speech, which Mrs. Gregson declared to be quite as good as the Recorder's any day of the week; and so their pleasant humour continued, relieved by an extemporised waltz or two in the drawing-room, until Vincent Elliott conducted Mrs. Gregson and Marian home, giving the younger lady's fingers at parting a very gentle squeeze, of which she said nothing to her aunt, or to any one else, until long afterwards.

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CHAPTER XI.

LUCKY JASPER MEETS WITH HIS REWARD FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.

Jack Spraggatt had not been idle in the interests of his country and of Jasper Jellifer. He had had a long interview with Vincent Elliott, which resulted in "preparing a case," and submitting the same to the proper authorities. Elliott received that immediate attention invariably paid to persons in a position to confer a benefit, and so remarkably in contrast to the reception of those asking a favour.

At Jack Spraggatt's suggestion, old Mr. Higgler, owing to his connection with the former transaction, was again put in commission. The ex-runner was at all times delighted to have the monotony of his retirement relieved by any little job in which an old friend was interested; and as Jasper Jellifer stood in this professional relation

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to him, Mr. Higgler would have grieved greatly had the execution of this little bit of business devolved upon any other person than himself.

Mrs. Jellifer had gone to keep her appointment with Mr. Warner, and was busy enough giving Jasper a bad character to that gentleman. Jasper had waited dinner for her, until his scanty provisions had grown cold and uninviting, and as unfed men, even when without appetite, are usually despondent or prone to melancholy, Jasper had been making numerous fancy sketches on the ceiling, wherein he represented himself as revelling on pauper allowance, or sitting on the pavement beside the well-known legend, "I am starving." Yet he had pinched, and saved, and sinned, to acquire more money, and it had become a mocking fiend that threatened to fly away every hour, and leave him a beggar.

> "O cursed lust of gold; when for thy sake
> The fool throws up his interest in both worlds,
> First starved in this, then damned in that to come."

He was in this pleasant frame of mind when

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Mr. Higgler and a friend entered the office, and had a brief audience with Jack-in-the-Box. Mr. Jerningham was for some time in a state of uncertainty whether Mr. Jellifer was within or not, and was only brought to the conviction that he was up-stairs waiting to take his dinner, by Mr. Higgler intimating his intention of ascertaining the fact for himself. Such a proceeding would have involved unpleasant consequences to Mr. Jerningham, and he therefore, with more agility than any one would have suspected him to display, jumped over the counter, and slipping past Mr. Higgler, ascended the stairs three at a stride. Mr. Jerningham had scarcely made his communication to Mr. Jellifer (who was always more or less disturbed by a vague fear whenever any stranger wished to see him), when Mr. Higgler entered the room, smiling faintly and wheezing audibly.

"How *do* ye do? My old friend. How do ye do?" said Mr. Higgler, blowing off each short sentence, like a jet of steam from an engine coming to a halt.

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"I knew I should be welcome—so I didn't wait for ceremony—but came up. Well, how do ye do? We haven't met for some years,—that is, to have a chat. We've passed in the streets now and then; but somehow or other, you always seemed too busy to stop and speak to one."

"Well! It is many years since we did meet," replied Jasper, his lip twitching convulsively,—"certainly many years. What has brought you now, sir?"

"You can go, Mr. Agility," said Higgler, addressing Jerningham, who had shut himself in between the door and the door-post, and pretended to be going down-stairs again; "my business is private."

Mr. Jerningham took the hint and descended to the office, where he was much surprised to find "the other party," as he described himself, making very impertinent inspection of the fixtures and fittings, in Mr. Jellifer's *sanctum*. Mr. Jerningham felt, at first, disposed to remonstrate, but the man was so cool in his manner, and so sinewy in his pro-

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portions, that Mr. J. retired to his box, and observed the other's proceedings through his secret look-out—the gimlet hole.

Mr. Higgler, having wiped his forehead with a large bandanna handkerchief, deposited the same with an airy jerk in the crown of his broad-brimmed hat, which he had placed upon the table, as though the business, upon which he was about to enter, was of the most cheerful character, and peculiarly agreeable to Jasper. In fact, such a communication as would have compelled a friend, of six-and-twenty years' standing, to have sought out Jasper, merely for the pleasure of being the communicator.

"Why, let me see, Mr. Jellifer," said Higgler, closing one eye, and sucking his teeth, to assist him in the calculation; "it must be as near six-and-twenty years ago as may be, since you were kind enough to put me up to that bit of business at Morden, and to 'nose' on your friend, the miller."

"Yes, yes," replied Jasper, as though anxious to dismiss the fact. "It is as long as that, I

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dare say. But to what am I indebted for this present visit?"

"That turned out a very good job for me," continued Higgler, "That little circumstance that came out of it—you remember—made Sir Gilbert very grateful, and he behaves like a gentleman to me annually. It seemed to have been likely to have turned out to your advantage also."

"It seemed to have turned out!" thought Jasper, repeating the words mentally. "It has done so."

"You remember little Cobby, as played the dulcimer so nicely?" asked Higgler; but not waiting for a reply, continued. "He's dead now, or how he would have laughed to have seen this day! You remember too, I dare say, how when he was put in possession for the Crown, how your good lady came and turned him out, under a Bill of Sale, and in charity let him stay the night over, almost compelling him to sleep in his box of music."

"Yes," said Jasper, getting very uneasy, but

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not defining the cause in the least. "Well, Mr. Higgler?"

"It is very strange how things do turn up, to be sure. Who'd have thought, that after the cheek you exhibited, and the luck you had to get possession, and the laugh you had of little Dulcimer, and me—oh, yes—I own it!—me also, that I should come here after these years, with a warrant in my pocket, to take you into custody for a fraud upon the Crown, in that very matter! It's really as good as a play. Don't you think so?" and Higgler laughed till his eyes watered.

Jasper evidently considered the play too serious to be laughed at, and he sat with an aghast look until Mr. Higgler had done laughing.

"You can't be in earnest?" he said; "you are joking for some reason?"

"'Pon my word, Mr. Jellifer, it's a fact," replied Higgler, "and it makes the case altogether the most beautiful affair I ever had in hand, in my long professional life. As we are keeping the Lord Mayor waiting, would you mind putting on your hat and coming at once?"

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"You really are serious, then?" cried Jasper, starting up. "What does this mean? What has happened?"

"Some document signed by you, and given to The Silver Eel,—I mean Raymond Ray, has turned up; but they'll explain it all to you at the Mansion House."

Jasper's face had assumed the hue of death, and large drops of sweat streamed down it, as he saw in an instant what the churchyard had given up, although he had believed the instrument destroyed long, long ago. Ray had almost told him as much, or perhaps he might not have braved his confederate's revenge, as he had done, by his neglect and silence.

"Come, Jasper, my man," said Higgler, in the kindest tones, "don't give way at such a moment! It's been a long time coming, and you have had a prosperous innings. You've one consolation—you've the Crown for prosecutor, and I shouldn't wonder if the Attorney-General don't attend to the case himself. I don't want to be pressing, but I must trouble you to be moving along, as

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we shall come to grief, now that we've made the caption, if we keep the Bench waiting."

"Of course," said Jasper, rising. "Of course! There is nothing for it, I suppose?"

"Nothing, Jasper; never was with me," replied Higgler, with proper dignity. "I would not spoil such a beautiful case as this will be, when quite completed, by the finish you'll give to it, for half the Bank of England."

"Very well. I wish my wife was at home. I'd just change my shirt."

Jasper's mind was evidently confused.

"I wouldn't change, if I was you," said Higgler, going to the door by which he had entered, and which Jasper was approaching mechanically. "They won't mind your appearance. They'll know you are not in your Sunday best. Oh! that's the room you are going to?" continued Higgler, as Jasper turned to another door which led to his bed-chamber. "Sleep there, I suppose? Is it airy?" and with more activity than might have been expected the old runner reached the door, and, opening it, satisfied himself that it was a bed-chamber.

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"Rather close, isn't it?" said Higgler. "You had better leave the door open while you change;" and Jasper, understanding the motives for the officer's consideration, made no objection. Jasper lingered over his toilet, wondering at the adverse turn in his fortunes, and conjecturing to what it would lead. Prison—confiscation—perhaps transportation! It *must*, if he should be found guilty of fraud on the Crown! Long, long imprisonment at least!

As these thoughts rushed through his mind, he became desperate, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, he threw up the window which opened to the back of the house, and with the quickness of youth jumped upon a covered cistern, and then into the yard. His evil genius was about him that day, for, alighting on a loose flag, he dislocated his ancle, and lay powerless, and in great agony.

Higgler heard the opening of the window, and then the noise of the fall. Like an experienced huntsman he did not look after his game, but instantly made a fresh cast, hastening down-stairs, and calling out to his companion, "Back-yard!"

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Jasper was brought into the office, and allowed to seat himself in his own peculiar chair.

"Haven't hurt yourself much, I hope, Mr. Jellifer?" said Higgler, quite tenderly. "Those loose flags are very dangerous to tread on—much more to jump on a matter of ten feet. You'd call it ten feet, Mr. Jellifer, wouldn't you?"

Jasper neither knew nor cared what the height had been; he was in pain both of mind and body.

"Let us get this matter over, Mr. Higgler," he replied; "send for a hackney coach."

"Or, perhaps, one of those new street cabs will do, Mr. Agility," said Higgler, as Mr. Jerningham, standing on the rail of his stool, peered out of his box; but without showing any disposition to understand Mr. Higgler's suggestion.

"Now then, sir, why don't you go?" cried Jasper. "Don't you see I've met with an accident, and these gentlemen are taking me to the hospital."

Mr. Jerningham was off like a swallow.

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"Very clever of Mr. Jellifer going to the hospital, was it not?" said Higgler, addressing his companion. "Shows such presence of mind; and suffering as he does. You need not be under any anxiety about Mrs. Jellifer and the premises," added Higgler, when the coach drew up at the door, "because my brother officer will stay here, and take care of everything, and I only wish he was little Dulcimer, that he might show your good lady how he would return good for evil. Lean on me, Mr. Jasper; don't be afraid! That's nicely; why, you'll dance a hornpipe in fetters in less than a week."

With this consoling remark, Jasper was assisted into a coach, and under the tender care of Mr. Higgler, conducted to the Mansion House, where, as Mr. Higgler had suggested, he met with every attention on the part of the Lord Mayor and the law officer of the Crown. The examination was very soon at an end, and in consideration of the accident which had overtaken the prisoner, he was committed at once to the Infirmary in Newgate, Mr. Higgler kindly going out of his way to see his

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old friend, Jasper Jellifer, safely rendered to his new lodgings. Having performed this act of friendship, he returned to Jasper's house a few minutes before Mrs. Jellifer got back from her visit to Warner, which had extended much beyond the time she had contemplated. Her employment during the morning, and the thoughts consequent upon it, had given her mind a criminal tendency; so when Jerningham met her at the door, and told her rapidly the occurrences of the preceding hour, with a quickness not unusual to persons whose lives have been passed in scheming and deceit, something like the truth flashed upon her, and she unlocked the drawer, behind which Jasper's secret hoard had been placed, and secured the notes as she had purposed doing at some later period. She was not one moment too soon, as the officer left in charge returned from an inspection of the house, and politely informed Mrs. Jellifer that none of the property upon the premises could be removed for the present.

Higgler was rather disconcerted when he recognised in Mrs. Jellifer the liberal lady at the

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Station Inn, and instantly suspected that some "plant" had been put upon him.

"Well, I never!" he said; "if I didn't think you and I had seen each other before, Mrs. Jellifer, the night we had that pleasant party at your expense. But we hadn't met, you see, for five-and-twenty years; and ladies do change so much in that time."

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Jellifer, laughing, "when we first met, I was a buxom woman enough, Mr. Higgler, and not the old—"

"Not a word against yourself in my hearing," interrupted Mr. Higgler. "You're much too good for your husband. He's committed, my dear."

"For what?" asked Mrs. Jellifer, more coolly than affectionately.

"A little matter of fraud against the Crown," replied Higgler, entering into the full particulars of the discovery of Ray's papers.

"I'm glad of that! Very glad of that," said Mrs. Jellifer, with much earnestness. "I am glad the first blow is not of my striking—

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though I would have struck it—and will drive this nail home for my poor brother's sake."

"Then you were not in the old plant?" exclaimed Higgler. "Thought you were not. I thought sister couldn't sell brother, as poor Ray was sold. I was sorry for the fellow; but duty was duty, you know."

"I don't blame you!" said Mrs. Jellifer. "It was your trade, and your duty; but to him that did betray him, and left him to die a worse death than a dog, I would do anything cruel. I have him at my mercy, and he shall—" She paused, and gave a fiendish smile at Higgler, adding: "I forgot to whom I was speaking. You now know why I made your acquaintance at the station. I had begun to suspect, from other causes, that my *dear* husband was a bitter villain, and what I overheard you say seemed to confirm it. I was determined to be quite sure before I set about my work. Mr. Higgler, even you must have a contempt for such men as Jasper Jellifer, and will not mind keeping what I have said to yourself. You must get me to see him to-night,

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if you can manage it. I suppose he will be in the infirmary. I will pay you liberally—more liberally than any broken-hearted wife that ever entered those gloomy walls."

Higgler promised to do his best, and the kind-hearted governor of the prison at that time yielded to Higgler's representations of the poor wife's distress, and allowed Mrs. Jellifer access to her husband, Higgler being present.

There was only one other patient in the ward where Jasper lay, but had there been a thousand it would have signified little to the remorseless woman who now sat by one sufferer's bedside.

"Well, Jasper," she said, "is this all true that I hear?—that your clever scheme to get possession of poor Raymond's property has been blown into the air after twenty-five years?"

"Yes, it seems so," replied Jasper, in a whisper; "but don't speak so loud about it—here, walls have ears."

"So I have heard, and some terrible stories they must have heard in their time, Jasper; but none more cruel, treacherous, and revengeful,

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than that which they are about to hear now from my lips."

"What do you mean, Barbara?" asked Jasper, alarmed at the words she had hissed into his ear, and still more terrified when he looked at her haggish face in the dim light of the prison ward.

"It is to be all known at last to living men, as it has been known to the devils which have been about our home for more than twenty years, that for fourteen hundred and odd pounds—that was the sum, I think—you sold into the hands of justice your foolish, confiding friend, and my dear and only brother. You told me that he owed you that sum —that it was all that you had scraped together at that time, and that its loss would have ruined you. You lied, and you deceived me. You held that money on trust for the miserable man sent away to do a convict's work —work so terrible, that to any man like poor Raymond it would become intolerable, if there was no hope somewhere for the

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wretch. My brother's hope was in you—in the friend to whom he had confided all that he possessed, believing that if he lost in the desperate game he was playing for their mutual advantage, his almost brother would stand true to him, and that he should some day overcome his trials. You deceived him, you left him to drag out a miserable life, until his sufferings ate into his heart, and day by day he sank into the grave—every hour marked by renewed or increased pain, and then he died —leaving his blood upon your guilty soul."

"Barbara, what is the meaning of this? Why have you come at this time to aggravate my distress?" asked Jasper.

"I loved my brother. Is that an answer?" replied Mrs. Jellifer. "You sold him for money —money which will slip through your fingers after all your cunning. You will pay dearly for your gains. I now see how Willy Hayes was murdered—cunningly murdered by you, Jasper."

"Are you mad, Barbara?" cried Jasper, starting up in his bed and confronting her.

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"No. Had I been a good woman, I should have been long ago, but I have learned to love money as well as you. Yet I would not have betrayed, tortured, killed men for it, as you have done!"

"You lie, Barbara!"

"No, Jasper—I speak the truth as it will be heard, they say, at the Day of Judgment. You killed Raymond by slow tortures. You killed Willy Hayes by slow poison. You knew that brandy was destruction to him, and until he was of age you kept him from it. When he had left you money, you placed the destroyer in his way, and though you neither strangled him, nor shed his blood yet, at your door lies his death!"

"I will not listen to such madness!" said Jasper; "I will call the warden and have you removed."

"Listen but a little longer, and then I will go of my own accord, never to look upon your miserable face again."

"What do you say? Great Heaven! You will not leave me—now——"

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"Now that you are lame, miserable, and about to undergo a disgraceful trial? Did you not abandon Raymond?—Did you not, you treacherous coward? So will I abandon you. You have given me nearly all your means, and I have them safely; even the hoardings behind the drawer in the iron chest—"

Jasper clasped his hands together over his head and uttered a cry which made Higgler come towards his bed.

"It is nothing," said Mrs. Jellifer,—"a paroxysm of pain—he moved his foot—he is quieter now."

Higgler retired to a distant part of the ward, and she continued in a low, calm, irritating tone.

"The means you have reserved to yourself will barely satisfy the Crown's demand, principal and interest, even should you escape the consequences of your perjury. You will leave your prison—whenever that may be—an utter beggar, Jasper Jellifer; and the presentiment you have had so long, that you would die in a gutter, bids fair to be realised."

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"You will not be so cruel, so heartless, Barbara, as to rob me of all, and leave me! How knew you of that hoard? Oh, you cannot be such a devil as to take all—to take all and let me die mad, as I shall do if half you have threatened come to pass."

"Die mad! Die starving! and then you will die as you deserve, according to your evil acts. Had you been the felon that my brother was, yet had been a true man, I would have worked my flesh from my bones—have shared beggary, exile with you; but knowing you to be most treacherous, cruel and cowardly, I leave you to your fate."

Mrs. Jellifer rose and said, most calmly, "I am ready to go, Mr. Higgler."

"No! she is not," cried Jasper. "She must not go! If she leaves me now, I shall go raving mad. Mr. Higgler, keep her here. Let her be searched before she leaves this place. She has money upon her which is mine! Barbara! Remember I am your husband still! Do not leave me! If you do, may every hour you live be cursed—"

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He then raved more fiercely, and uttered fearful imprecations, whilst Barbara, his wife, looked back upon him with a devilish smile on her face, and waved him adieu!

When she had gone, Jasper could not realise the scene which had just taken place. She still seemed to sit by his bedside, whispering those terrible words which were never again to be long out of his mind—no, not when he stood in the felon's dock, and heard the story of his treachery and fraud told over again, and proved piecemeal, and commented upon by counsel and judge: her voice then remained louder than all, pronouncing the hard sentence, that she had possessed herself of all his ill-gotten wealth, and had fled with it.

Throughout the night he could not sleep, the pain of his sprained limb scarcely felt, through the misery of his mind. He could not for some time distinctly remember the threat she had made to see him no more, and when he did so the fierceness of her look and the serpent-like hissing of her voice made him believe that she had spoken too much in earnest, to admit of the

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slightest hope that she would relent. Then how he raved! upbraiding himself for his confiding folly, which had made her mistress of his fortunes. When he had exhausted that cause of wretchedness, he could not shut out the hideous picture she had drawn of Ray's betrayal, and his subsequent miserable sufferings and death. Why had he not bought, for the small sum which Ray had demanded as a test of his good faith, the damnable knowledge brought from the Bush by Spraggatt? He would have given then ten times the amount —but it was too late. All was too late—his deed of gift could not be recalled! His betrayal of Ray—his indifference to the convict's suffering—all too late for remedy in this world, and he had long since ceased to look beyond it. Ten days before the Sessions! and during the intervening time these thoughts came back to him until he longed for his trial to be over, although he could not define any expectancy which was to bring alleviation from his torment.

Oh! false money, so to deceive him! Oh! wicked money, so to have tempted him! All his

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little cheats had prospered so well, all his meanness had caused him so little shame before it became habit, and so much gratification after, that he had never imagined his greater villainies would bring this double ruin, loss of character and loss of wealth. One ray of hope at last! He would send to Sir Gilbert Norwold, and use his guilty secret to induce him to obtain an easy sentence. Still his gold would be gone! His wife—his wicked, deceitful wife!

He sent to Sir Gilbert, and that gentleman, imagining that the required interview had reference to his own affairs, went to his incarcerated agent.

Jasper told him of the peril in which he stood, and of the cruel desertion of his wife. He reminded Sir Gilbert of his long devotion to his family, and even ventured to refer to certain services rendered to Sir Gilbert's mother. Was that all? If so, Jasper might as well have talked to the stone walls around him, for any touch of human sympathy awakened in the dead heart of Gilbert Norwold.

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Jasper grew desperate, witnessing the indifference of the employer for whom he had not hesitated to swear falsely, and in his despair he reminded Sir Gilbert that men had been driven to make revelations sometimes, even when they could receive no benefit from their disclosures, although others had lost station, honour, and wealth, by such confessions. If they hunted him to bay, if he saw every hand armed against him, he would not fall unavenged. Sir Gilbert had bought his wicked services in beforetime, let him now buy silence of the evil done by himself, or beware of the consequences!

"Contemptible creature! Impotent bravo!" said Sir Gilbert. "Beware of you? Fear anything which you can say? I am ashamed to have listened to you so long! If, by holding up this finger, I could save you from the punishment you so justly merit and will receive, I would not raise it."

Sir Gilbert went away, and when Jasper was taken back to his ward, he threw himself upon his prison-bed, and in the agony of mind, pro-

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duced by a consciousness of utter desertion, he beat his head upon the hard pillow, and howled like one in bodily pain. The warders used gentle words at first to silence him, but finding them of no avail, threatened him with the punishment awarded to the refractory. That quieted him, for even his gaoler's presence was some relief, some little evidence of human sympathy, whereas, to have been shut up alone in a dark cell—to see nothing but the fearful shadows of his past crimes, to hear nothing but the hissing voice always present in his ears when alone—recounting his misdeeds, and reckoning over his lost wealth, appeared to be anticipating the grave and the dread beyond.

The day of trial came at last. Those among the witnesses who had known the smug trader in the little town of Morden, looked at him for some time before they could connect their lucky neighbour with the haggard conscience-stricken wretch who stood shuffling about in the felon's dock. He could readily recall the faces upturned to his, and knew them to be those of honest plodding men,

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who had had to hunt the wolf from their doors when he had refused them a neighbour's service. Yet some of them had grown grey and wealthy by hard striving, and others had only won respect and honest names, but were richer by those acquisitions than he had ever been. After awhile he looked at them one by one, hoping to find some expression of friendly recognition or neighbourly sorrow. He looked in vain! He saw that he was sentenced already in their minds, and that none believed his punishment undeserved.

The trial did not occupy very long. The facts were readily proved, and had all the wickedness of the man been known his sentence could not have been more severe, as it left him penniless.

The Morden witnesses went from the court to have dinner at one of the neighbouring taverns, and as they drank, and cracked their old jokes, they paused now and then to wonder at the fate of Jasper Jellifer, the lucky, always lucky man — whom they had known so many years.

"It has long been a saying of mine, Mr.

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Spraggatt"—Jack was in the chair, at the request of many an old acquaintance—"It's long been a saying of mine: before you envy any man his good fortune, or bemoan his bad, 'Wait for the End.'"

The speaker was the Morden sexton, and a very good man in his way. Jasper Jellifer's was a bad end enough, but not worse, perhaps, than he deserved to find at the close of such a life. Detection he would have cared for but little, as he had well known that few—if one—of his acquaintance cared anything for him beyond the bargain of the hour. He had assisted to transport the only one who had ever shown much sympathy with him, and had been repaid for his treachery at last. The other human being with whom he had lived and toiled, and shared what small affection he could separate from self, had hit him a foul blow. She had cheated him by her skill in playing on the only string that vibrated in the muscle which he called his heart, and when she had charmed him into an idiotic confidence, had plundered him of all, and was free to carry

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it away to the uttermost parts of the earth, if it so pleased her. That was his terrible punishment! That was the end of his cunning.

When the trial was over, Jasper was taken back to his cell, and a letter placed in his hands. He knew the writing. It was from Barbara. She had written:

"I have been in court, and heard your trial and condemnation. My brother's fate will come back to you every day. To-morrow I take with me all *we* scraped together with so much privation, and leave England for ever."

Jasper never saw her more. So let them both depart from our story.

Mr. Jerningham lost his place and his box, but he was by no means depressed at the turn matters had taken. Mrs. Jellifer had evidently been a good pay-mistress for the gimlet-hole information, as Mr. Jerningham was the first of those sanguine gentlemen who believed that an independence was to be obtained by having their names and the words "Coal Merchant" engraved on a brass plate, and placing the same

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on a door in any locality where building was progressing. His penultimate was the Insolvent Court, and his termination the workhouse. The Jellifer gold had ceased to be lucky.

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CHAPTER XII.

GERARD AND GILBERT MEET AT LAST, AND OUR STORY ENDS.

Mr. Warner's letter to Sir Gilbert Norwold received an unsatisfactory and laconic answer: Sir Gilbert never called upon persons with whom he was unacquainted, nor concerning business on which he was uninformed.

Mr. Warner's rejoinder was equally short but effective, as the messenger returned within an hour and brought a note stating that Sir Gilbert would keep Mr. Warner's appointment. He did so punctually, either from habit or a desire to learn the nature of the information possessed by Mr. Warner, and which, he had been assured, affected him seriously.

Warner had darkened the room and put on a broad eye-shade, fearing that Sir Gilbert might too readily recognise him, as Mrs. Jellifer had

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done; and, therefore, when the brothers met, it was as strangers.

Warner made brief excuse for the darkness of the room, and then requested Sir Gilbert to be seated. A host of recollections connected with their boyhood passed rapidly through his mind at the sight of his brother, and those old memories kept him silent longer than suited the patience of his visitor.

"Are you the writer of this letter, wherein it is stated that my property and title are in danger?" said Sir Gilbert.

"I am, sir."

"Am I to learn your reasons for such an assertion," asked Sir Gilbert.

"Yes—but first to my own business," said Warner; "my name, sir, may have suggested it."

"Warner!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert, rising, "I have been dull, indeed, not to have suspected this subterfuge."

"The thought is worthy of you, sir," replied Warner, hastening to the door and locking it.

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"Surely you dare not offer me violence, or detain me here against my will?" said Sir Gilbert.

"I will offer no violence; but here you shall remain until I choose to close our conference. You then are free to go," answered Warner, in a tone which proved his earnestness.

"Well, sir," replied the other, "as I am compelled to listen, speak on."

"I am the father of your son's wife," said Warner, "and I claim your recognition of their marriage, unless you can declare some valid reason for refusing it."

"Valid reason! Do you require other than the fact that she is your daughter? My son forgot he had a father," replied Sir Gilbert.

"Who taught him that forgetfulness, but you? Have you throughout his life ever sought his love —his obedience—by one act of fatherly affection? Had you the right to be remembered?" asked Warner.

"My son was brought up according to my will and judgment, sir, and fitted to have maintained his proper station in the world. He has chosen

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to make his own election of position, and forgot the name he bore. I will never overlook his unworthy marriage."

"I had looked for no other answer," said Warner, "and for the present dismiss the subject. I have told you that your property and title are in danger. You know well how you obtained them, and I am prepared to prove that both are yours unjustly."

"Those are bold words, sir," said Sir Gilbert.

"They would be so, if uttered rashly," was the reply. "Be pleased to read that paper," and Warner placed in Gilbert's hand Mrs. Jellifer's statement.

As Gilbert read what she had written, he laughed scornfully at times, and when he had finished, threw the paper upon the table. "Is that your proof, sir? The assertions of a felon and his fitting companion. I have already been threatened with such a disclosure, and treated it with the same contempt as I do now. What further, sir?"

Warner unlocked a cabinet, and took from

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it the earth-stained box, which he had received from Spraggatt.

"Some years ago," said Warner, "your brother Gerard was accused of theft, and driven from his father's house, dishonoured and disclaimed. One person only could have proved his innocence, and was silent. Need I name him to you?"

"Yes," answered Gilbert, boldly, although a deadly feeling of fear possessed him.

"Gilbert Norwold, you were the only witness to your brother's innocence, and were silent. Do not stir until I have ended. You did not speak because you must have accused yourself."

"Insolent libeller," said Gilbert; "you would not dare to utter such a calumny before others. Do so, and I will make you prove your scandalous assertion, or bitterly account to me for it."

"Let me prove it to you alone, sir," replied Warner, calmly, "for the sake of the name you bear. After all these years, a witness comes to confront you, in your dead father's image. You know these features?" and Warner held before him the long-hidden bracelet.

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Gilbert recoiled as he looked upon it, and could not speak for some moments, but sat regarding it as though he feared the painted face would speak, and denounce him.

"Yes," he said, at length, "that bracelet was my mother's, and was lost sometime before her death. It is now mine, and I claim it, sir."

"Dare you? Dare you take into your hand again this evidence of your Cain-like perfidy? Listen to what has lain buried with it for six-and-twenty years, before you do so."

Warner then read the paper, which had been found with the bracelet, and to which Gilbert's signature was attached, and, as the words came slowly from his lips, Gilbert trembled visibly.

"Dare you take it now?" continued Warner, as Gilbert Norwold sat, his eyes bent upon the ground.

"There was no subterfuge in my request to see you here," said Warner, as he drew up the blind, and removed the shade he had worn; "and if you

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doubt your danger still, look at me,—others have discerned what you may not fail to see also."

Gilbert obeyed, and when he had looked at Warner stedfastly for a few moments, he hid his face in his hands and exclaimed, "Great heaven! my brother Gerard!"

"Yes, sir, your deeply injured brother, prepared as you have seen to claim my own at the cost of all that makes life valuable to you. I have no wish to prolong this painful interview, therefore listen to me. I know your unthankful nature, and look for no return for the concessions I propose to make. Indeed, I deserve none, for it is not for your sake, but for your son, and for those whose future is unhappily bound up with yours. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Yes," replied Gilbert, his head resting on the table.

"I will forego my just claims to title and inheritance on the conditions I am about to make. First, that you acknowledge your son's marriage with my daughter openly, and with the

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consideration due to their mutual worthiness. Do you consent to this?"

"I do."

"So! you yield to fear what you denied to justice. Secondly, I require you to make such provision for Mr. Edward Norwold as I shall think fitting, and secured upon those estates which my father bequeathed to you in ignorance of the wrong he was committing in making you his sole heir. Do you consent to this, also?"

"I do! I do!" cried Gilbert, "and thank your generous nature—"

"Hush! There has been enough of falsehood already, Gilbert Norwold. On the conditions I have mentioned being honestly fulfilled by you, I promise to remain, as men have known me for years past—George Warner; and further, for our children's sake, never to disclose to them that it was your wickedness which made me an exile, and drove me to assume a name which was not my father's. Do you accept these conditions? Will you fulfil them in truth and honesty?"

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"I will," answered Gilbert, holding out his hand, but Warner disregarded the action, and proceeded:

"As your future course is shaped, Gilbert, so will I strive to forgive you. At present I should mock at truth, to say I can forgive the impenitent. You can never deceive—never betray me again. You are free to go. Shall I ring the bell?"

Gilbert bowed affirmatively, and Warner having unlocked the door, rung for the servant; and the two brothers parted, never to meet again.

The proposals made by Warner were duly carried out, and society was not much shocked or surprised when, in the course of a year afterwards, it heard that Sir Gilbert and Lady Norwold had separated by mutual consent, and that he had gone abroad, few knew, and none cared whither.

Warner proved the truest friend that Lady Norwold had ever known in her purposeless life, and she came to believe that to discharge her duties properly, and to enjoy the good with which

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she had been blessed, she must have regard for more than cold, ever-exacting Self.

Our story is nearly ended, and we would part pleasantly with those who may have waited for the end without weariness, if any such there be. So let us blow the prompter's whistle once again, and change the scene for the last time.

The hour was four in the afternoon, and Vincent Elliott, with a slightly flushed cheek, and uneasy manner, was alone in Warner's drawing-room. A carriage, containing Mrs. Gregson and Miss Marian Mayley had driven up some short half-hour before, and the ladies having been received in Warner's room, were there detained to listen to a certain statement from that gentleman, which in no way concerned himself, further than that it enabled him to repay in part the debt of gratitude he owed to Mr. Elliott, for the sympathy he had shown when Warner's heart was aching at his daughter's absence. Marian Mayley blushed very much, and Mrs. Gregson giggled as she had done thirty years ago, when she was Miss Protheroe, and had had a private interview with the

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late Mr. Gregson, in the days of his retail business, and long before he had been elected alderman, or even common councilman of his ward in the City.

Mr. Warner was a capital diplomatist in some matters, and he had not failed in his present mission, as he entered the drawing-room with a smile upon his face that spoke success to Vincent Elliott.

"Well, my dear sir," said Vincent, somewhat impatiently, "have you seen Miss Mayley?"

"Yes; and I think you may take up the wooing for yourself," replied Warner. "Here are the ladies."

As Mrs. Gregson and Miss Mayley had entered the room, and exchanged the usual civilities, though with more embarrassment between the younger people than either had exhibited of late, Mr. Warner, in the most malicious manner possible, requested Mrs. Gregson to favour him and Mrs. Warner with a few minutes' private conversation. Mrs. Gregson gave him a knowing look, and slapped his arm with her substantial

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fingers, shaking her yellow turban so violently at the same time that the bird of paradise seemed spreading its wings for flight.

When the young people were left together, Vincent said, his voice falteringly tremulous:

"Miss Mayley—May I venture to continue the subject which Mr. Warner has commenced?" No answer.—"I did not dare approach it myself without his intervention, remembering my former impertinence. Have you forgiven me that act of folly?"

"I am afraid so," replied Marian, very softly, and the confession emboldened Vincent to take her hand.

"How very kind of you!" said Vincent; "but I was desperate."

"I also was a mental invalid, Mr. Elliott,"—her voice grew stronger, and she ventured once to raise the long fringes which hid her beautiful eyes,—"Mr. Warner's treatment was anything but agreeable; but I trust it cured me of much vanity and some careless confidence in outward appearance. It was rather cruel to

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tempt me with such a glittering deceit as 'my lord.'"

"Nay, Mr. Warner has told you that I was indebted to your maid for my barony," said Vincent, pressing the unresisting hand he held between his own.

"So I have heard, I confess." Her eyes were unveiled again, and looked kindly at Vincent.

"Then I may hope?" said Vincent, reading that look with a lover's quickness.

Marian shook her head rather archly. "My vanity might have received the lord—my heart must now elect the commoner."

"Then be a generous constituent," said Vincent, raising the hand to his lips, "and give a plumper in my favour." He hardly knew what he was saying.

"I believe it is usual to know a candidate's qualifications, is it not?" asked Marian, all smiles and blushes.

"I am a gentleman by birth and education," said Vincent,—proving it, we suppose, by placing his arm around her slender waist.

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"Most candidates have those qualifications," replied Marian, making a preposterously slight effort to disengage herself.

"I am six-and-twenty," said Vincent.

"That is a questionable recommendation," replied Marian, archly, and quite reconciled to the alien arm.—"Recollect, your election would be for life."

"True!" said Vincent, a little confused; and therefore he added, "I'm a barrister-at-law."

Marian was content with her little advantage, so she smiled more beautifully than before, and said, "I think a wig would spoil you."

"If I promise it shall be a Lord Chancellor's?" cried Vincent.

"Oh, bribery! bribery! You are tempting me with a ladyship again!" answered Marian, laughing at her own cleverness, until Vincent made her utter a sweet, feeble scream, by fairly pressing her to his bosom.

What then they said to each other, the young may imagine, and the old remember; but when Mr. and Mrs. Warner, followed by Mr. Gregson,

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Edward, and Florence, entered the dining-room, they were seated by each other, to all outward appearance, affianced lovers.

"You see, Florence," said Warner, "the force of your example. It is useless to write up 'Dangerous!—Beware of matrimony!'"

"You forget, dear father, that Love is blind, and cannot read the warning," replied Florence.

"That is an error of the old painters," said Warner. "Hymen should have worn the bandage."

"What then, dear sir?" replied Edward. "He would have had Hope for a guide."

"Hope! life's will o' the wisp," said Warner, laughing.—"No: Experience is our only safe guide, young people."

"Not so, sir!" cried Elliott from his seat on the sofa. "Experience has his face to the past. Youth must have a companion that looks to the future."

The servant announced Captain Elmsley.

"I am glad we are interrupted," said Warner, "or I should have been led to think the

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present generation no wiser than their forefathers. Why do you not ask Captain Elmsley up-stairs?"

"He requested to be announced, sir," said the servant, "whilst he arranged his cravat, and put on his pumps in the parlour."

"What a strange compound of vanity, meanness, and benevolence," said Warner, smiling.

"Nay, meanness is surely an exception in his character!" replied Florence, remembering all his kindness to her husband and herself.

"What says Mr. Elliott?" said Warner.

"Ah, you puzzle me," replied Vincent. "The Captain is a living enigma which I am incapable of solving. If you speak of him, or think of him, he is smiling at your elbow *par exemple;*" and Captain Elmsley entered the room with all the grace, and somewhat the appearance, of "a friend of George the Fourth."

The gentlemen received him with courtesy, and the ladies with smiles, especially Florence, who could not forget her great obligations to him.

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Miss Mayley also felt that she was under some obligation to the bold Captain, and therefore curtseyed to him, saying, "I am afraid Captain Elmsley has forgotten me."

"My dear madam, I wish you hadn't said that," replied the Captain; "but in your presence I feel a little diffidence."

"Diffidence!" exclaimed Vincent.

"Yes—I hope the sensation is not likely to last; if it does, I am ruined," said Elmsley, laughing; "but I cannot forget, though I will endeavour to forgive, an opinion that was once—"

"Expressed by me, sir. I retract and apologise; but one word in private," said Warner, motioning Elmsley to the window.

"I think you will excuse me in some measure, when I ask, Do you remember Lieutenant Hammerton, with whom you served in New South Wales many years ago?"

"Hammerton! Yes!" replied Elmsley, "an ungrateful scamp. He emigrated to Boulogne three years ago with my opera-glass and crush hat, which I had lent him."

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"Did you never lend him anything else?"

"Nothing," answered the Captain.

"Never your name?" asked Warner, pointedly.

"I meant, nothing of value," replied Elmsley.

"Is that your autograph," and Warner showed him a bill of exchange for £100, faded now, being dated some eighteen years before, as long ago as the time when Hammerton was recalled suddenly to England.

"Why, yes," replied Elmsley, examining one of the signatures to the long-forgotten document, "I believe that is my 'Elmsley.'"

"You see how my mistake arose," said Warner, presenting the paper to the Captain. "Will you accept of this as my written apology?"

"Really," replied Elmsley, rather taken aback. "Really—why—yes, with much pleasure; for it will remind me how easily an injury may be inflicted—how kindly redressed. I'll have it framed, Mr. Warner, as a proof of my respectability."

The two whisperers then joined the others, Elmsley attaching himself for a moment to Elliott,

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who did not want him, and who could be a little rude at times.

"Well, Captain," he said, "I am glad to see you here, by Jove; how expensively you are decorated!"

"My dear boy," said Elmsley, undisturbed by the remark; "it is the boast of some honest people that they are always prepared for the worst; it is mine, that I am always dressed for the best."

The Captain then glided away to where Florence and her mother were seated, and told them how kindly Mr. Warner had explained away an expression which had given him much pain, and showed them what he was pleased to call "one of his early indiscretions." Warner approaching at the moment, Florence threw her arms around his neck, saying, "Oh, you dear kind papa! You have made every one happy and contented!"

The advent of Uncle Jack completed the little party met to celebrate, unknown to all but Warner, Lucy and her brother, the consummation of the

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struggle of long years. When they assembled at dinner, Jack again found himself seated by the side of Marian's good-natured, vulgar Aunt, whose attentions to him might have suggested the possibility, that the Gregson relict, and the yellow turban wreathed with orange blossoms, were within his reach, had he desired to possess them. But Jack had planted all his true love years ago, and when it came to an untimely end, he resolved to cultivate bachelor's buttons to the end of his days. As he knew little of the world of London, or indeed of the world generally, he took the Captain into his pay as a Mentor and amanuensis, although Lucy and Florence always asserted that the engagement was only Uncle Jack's clever way of adding to the Captain's annuity.

Our story is told. The wise man of Stratford has said—

> "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will;"

and we have striven to illustrate this truthful text.

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the Past worthy to be remembered? Or must they pass away again, only to shame him who has evoked them.

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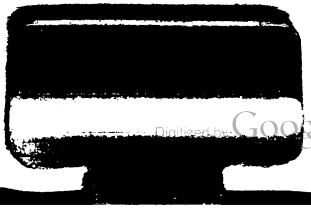

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